APOCALYPSE - THE BOOK OF THE END

An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation of St. John the Theologian

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Hearken, hearken to what will happen in the latter days of the world ! There will be great wars ; unjust laws will be enacted; the Church will be despoiled of her property ; people will read and write a great deal ; but charity and humility will be laughed to scorn, and the common people will believe in false ideas.

St. Columba of Iona, Apostle of Scotland (+597)

When pictures look alive, with movements free,
When ships like fish swim beneath the sea,
When men oustripping birds can soar the sky,
Then half the world deep drenched in blood shall die.

An Old English Prophecy.

So, be warned, my friend. I have given you the signs of the antichrist. Do not merely store them in your memory. Pass them on to everyone without stint. If you have a child after the flesh, teach them to him forthwith. And if you have become a godparent, forewarn your godchild, lest he should take the false christ for the True. For "the mystery of lawlessness doth already work."

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

As is written in the Gospel, nobody knows the time of the coming of the Antichrist. But there are already signs that he will come soon. Seeing the persecution against the faith and the striving to destroy it, and also much else, we must think that this time is approaching. But still it is impossible to say anything exactly.

Hieromartyr Nicon of Optina (+1931).

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PROLOGUE

Close the words, and seal the book to the time of the end;
until many are taught and knowledge is increased.
Daniel 12.4.

The Apocalypse has as many mysteries as words.
Blessed Jerome, Epistle 53.

The book of Revelation – the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian – has remained a sealed book until the beginning of our most apocalyptic of epochs. Its glorious and terrifying images have impressed themselves on the minds of generations of Christians, and its triumphant hope of the ultimate victory of good over evil has comforted the hearts of many fighters for the truth. Alone, however, among the books of the New Testament, it has no generally accepted interpretation, no exegetical "consensus of the Fathers". In fact, it is the only part of the New Testament that is not read publicly at some time in the liturgical year of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.[1] It is sealed in the sense that it is not read in church, and also in the sense that its meaning remains shrouded in mystery.[2]

The Study of the Book

And yet the book itself beckons us, encouraging us to penetrate the mystery. **Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein; for the time is at hand** (1.3). And again: **Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book... Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand** (22.7, 10).

Shortly before the Russian revolution, St. Barsanuphius of Optina wrote: "In the Apocalypse it is said: **Blessed is he that readeth the words of this book.** If this is written, it means that it is really so, for the words of the Sacred Scripture are the words of the Holy Spirit. But in what does this blessedness consist? The more so, in that people may object that we do not understand anything of what is written. Perhaps it consists in the consolation to be gained from reading the Divine words. One can also think as follows: that which is not understood by us now will become understandable when the time

[1] However, according to the *Typicon* of the Orthodox Church, the Apocalypse is appointed to be read during the Saturday evening vigil service as part of the reading of the whole New Testament. See Archbishop Averky, *Guide to the Study of the Sacred Scriptures of the New Testament*, volume II, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1956, p. 378 (in Russian). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Archbishop Averky will be from this work.

[2] As a far from Christian modern writer on the Apocalypse has said: "A book lives as long as it is unfathomable" (D.H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse,* Granada, 1981, p. 2).

described comes to pass.[3] Judge for yourselves. Who reads the Apocalypse now? Almost exclusively those who live in monasteries and in theological academies and seminaries – they have to. But in the world hardly anyone reads it. Hence it is clear that he who will read the Apocalypse before the end of the world will be truly blessed, for he will understand what is taking place. And in understanding he will prepare himself. In reading he will see in the events described in the Apocalypse one or other of the events contemporary with him."[4]

Again, at the beginning of the revolution the Church writer Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov wrote: "The general opinion of all interpreters of the Apocalypse is that the events revealed in it are becoming clearer the closer we come to the time of their realization. At the present time, when much of that which was announced then has already been realized and the world is coming nearer and nearer to the end of the promises, it is of course easier than before to catch the consequentiality of events. But this easiness is very relative. The history of the world is revealed in the Apocalypse in a very interwoven and complicated picture. The book presents a series of separate visions which encompass now one and now another aspect of the events, sometimes returning again to one and the same event, sometimes speaking earlier about an event that is chronologically later. For some visions there is no chronology at all, since they do not depict the earthly flow of affairs, but the condition of things. Many visions do not touch events here, but the struggle of heavenly and hellish forces. All this is so complicated and difficult for the mind that has not been enlightened by the same spiritual vision [as the seer himself] that one could completely renounce the hope of penetrating into the mysteries of this greatest of visions. But the Saviour Himself commanded that we should be attentive to the signs of the times so as not to be caught unawares by them. And in the Apocalypse it is said: **blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book**. It is impossible to keep without understanding what we are required to keep. Therefore, in spite of all difficulties, we must try to understand everything that now, according to the will of God, may turn out to be accessible to our understanding."[5]

The Signs of the End

Thus blessed is he that reads this book, not in isolation, but in conjunction with **the signs of the times**, which the Lord commanded us to discern with care: **ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?** (Matthew 16.3). We *must*, with God's help and in all humility, at least attempt to discern the signs of the times by comparing them

[3] As Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow said: "The prophecies become clearer the nearer we come to their decisive fulfilment" (quoted in Sergius and Tamara Fomin, *Russia before the Second Coming* (Third Edition), Sergiev Posad, 1998, vol. I, p. 19 (in Russian)).

[4] Sergius Fomin, *Russia before the Second Coming* (First Edition), Sergiev Posad, 1993, p. 79 (in Russian).

[5] Tikhomirov, *The Religio-Philosophical Foundations of History*, Moscow, 1997, p. 555 (in Russian).

with this, the most significant of books for our time. For, as Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow writes, "None of the mysteries of the most secret wisdom of God ought to appear alien or altogether transcendent to us, but in all humility we must apply our spirit to the contemplation of Divine things."[6] Moreover, as Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava writes, "everybody who loves the Truth must not only take note of the signs of the times, but also follow these observations to their logical conclusion."[7]

And these signs are indeed apocalyptic. **Wars and rumours of wars**, especially of a nuclear and biochemical Armageddon threatening the extinction of the whole of humanity; **famines and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places**, including the inexorably increasing pollution of the planet; the many **false prophets**; the persecution of the Faith, the falling away of many, the increase of iniquity and especially **the cooling of love** even among those who are called Christians – all this must convince the discerning Christian that he is at least at **the beginning of sorrows**, and that only **he that shall endure to the end.. shall be saved** (Matthew 24.6-13).

Other signs of the end are the extraordinary growth of science, the return of the Jews to Israel, the unprecedented apostasy from, and persecution of, the Christian faith, and the appearance of false Christs and antichristian religions in bewildering abundance. As Fr. Seraphim Rose writes in his translator's introduction to Archbishop Averky's commentary: "We do seem, indeed, to be living in the last times of this world's existence, when the prophecies of the Apocalypse relating to the end of the world are beginning to be fulfilled. The time is surely ripe – especially in view of the numerous false interpretations of this book which fill the contemporary air."[8]

One of the passages from the Apocalypse that has found an almost exact fulfilment in our time is the description of the star called **Wormwood** – "Chernobyl" in Ukrainian – which falls from heaven and poisons the waters (8.10-11). Even the most hardened sceptics have been forced to admit that this is a quite remarkable foreshadowing of the nuclear catastrophe that took place at Chernobyl in the Ukraine in 1986, which has contaminated the water supply of the region. Again, the advances in modern computer and laser technology have thrown unexpected light on the possible meaning of the number 666 (Revelation 13) in terms of bar-codes and microchips implanted under the skin, and how it might form part of a world-wide food distribution system controlled by the Antichrist.

Thus the Christian must see that he refuses not Him that speaks both through the Divine Scriptures of the Apocalypse and through contemporary

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[6] Metropolitan Philaret, *Sermons and Addresses of the Metropolitan Philaret*, Moscow, 1844, part II, p. 87; quoted in Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, London: James Clarke, 1957, p. 8.

[7] Archbishop Theophanes, *Selected Letters*, Liberty, TN: St. John of Kronstadt Press, 1989, p. 44.

[8] In Archbishop Averky, *The Apocalypse in the Teachings of Ancient Christianity*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1995, pp. 34-35.

events. **For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall we not escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we, receiving a Kingdom that cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire...** (Hebrews 12.25-29).

The Time of the End

But one may object: does not all this speculation about the end time contradict the words of the Saviour Himself, Who said that **of that day or hour knoweth no man, no, not the Angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed and pray: for you know not when the time is** (Mark 13.32-33)?

After all, even such a holy man as the Romanian St. Callinicus of Cernica erred in expecting the end of the world to come in 1848. But St. Nicholas and St. George appeared to him and told him that he still had time to build the monastery of Cernica… However, Saints Nicholas and George did not rebuke St. Callinicus for speculating about the time of the end. And the Lord even helped him in his speculations by unfurling a radiant scroll in the heavens on which was written: "7500 years from Adam". In other words, the end would come not before the year 1992 or 2000 (depending on whether we follow the Constantinopolitan Church in dating Christ's birth to 5508 B.C., or the Antiochian in dating it to 5500 B.C.).[9]

In any case, we are not speculating about the *exact* time of the end, which, as the Lord says, is known to no man, and not even to the Son *as man*, but only to God. As Tikhomirov writes: "Without doubt, the precise time is hidden from men, in accordance with the task of Providence. The Christian period has as its mission to choose out of humanity everything that it can give birth to for the Kingdom of God. In the task of salvation Providence helps men, while the opponent of God, the devil, hinders. But men must also act with their own independent efforts. Mankind decides with its own free will whether to go towards God or reject Him. While there are among men those who wish to be with God – and this is always known to God – the end of the world will not come. The stronger the pressure of evil, the more possible, by contrast, is the proximity of the end. In history there have been times when the pressure of evil has been so strong that it seemed that there was no further reason for the world to exist, and if the anti-God mood had become finally entrenched then the end of the world would have come. The multitude of small 'potential' antichrists, of whom the Apostle John already spoke, would immediately have promoted from their midst someone capable of growing

[9] Fr. Oleg Molenko, "On patristic 'mistakes' in interpretation", http://www.omolenko.com/texts/tol0_4.htm (in Russian).

into the real Antichrist. Such epochs, of which ours is one, in their character truly constitute **the last times**. But are they chronologically the last? We cannot know that, because if the free will of men, amazed by the disgusting sight of **the abomination of desolation** in the holy place, strives again towards God, the Antichrist, already ready to enter the world, will again be cast into the abyss until conditions more favourable for him arise, while the Lord will again lengthen the term of life of the world so that new members should be prepared for the Kingdom of God. The Lord knows the term of the life of the world, but He does not reveal it to men in order that our free will should not be bound by the thoughts: 'if it's not soon' or 'it's all the same – it's already late', for our work for the Kingdom of God must not be conditioned by such applied considerations, but by the free search for good or evil, by the free desire to work for the Lord or reject Him. In accordance with this, man does not need the numerical calculation of terms, but only the discernment of the spiritual-moral maturity of good or the pressure of evil, so that he can in a purposeful and directed manner struggle against evil and do the work of God.

"However, if the exact terms of the life of the world and its final dénouement are hidden from men, this is nevertheless not so in an absolute sense. Eschatalogical Revelations give us the possibility of see the consequentiality of future events, that is, not the existence of a series of epochs in which we gradually approach the completion of the cycle of evolution. In giving us the possibility of noticing them, Revelation undoubtedly was aiming to support the faith of people in the reality of **the promises**. When we observe the condition of the world and see that that which was foretold by Daniel or John the Theologian many centuries before has really taken place in it, then, of course, we are more strongly established in faith and and with this support we work more energetically for the creation of good, for the struggle against evil.

"Such a support of faith becomes the more necessary the further we go from the times of the Saviour, without seeing His Second Coming. The Apostle Peter says that in the last times there will appear people who will say: **Where is the promise of His Coming? For since the time our fathers began to die, from the beginning of creation, everything remains the same** (II Peter 3.4). At the present time such doubts are already extremely widespread, and one can say that nothing more powerfully undermines Christianity than its teaching on the end of the world, because this end has begun to appear improbable. The sa me doubt in the coming of the Messiah, Who has been awaited fruitlessly for so long, has given birth among the Jews to the thought that this idea must be understood in the sense of the coming of the dominion of Israel itself. Among the Moslems (in Ismailitism) the vain expectation of the Mahdi has also led them to the idea of the metaphorical understanding of this coming, to the thought that in reality it means only the spreading of the spirit of Mahdi among people. All this is, of course, very natural, for there is no fiercer temptation for faith than the non-fulfilment of **the promises**. But the whole essence of Christianity lies in the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Second Coming of Christ. **If we have hope on Christ only in this life,** says

the Apostle Paul, **then we are of all men the most miserable… When I fought with wild beasts in Ephesus, what use was it to me if the dead do not rise? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!** (I Corinthians 15.19; 19.32). Prince S. Trubetskoy is absolutely right in pointing to the fact that 'Christianity cannot renounce its faith in Godmanhood and the Kingdom of God without renouncing itself… Is the world process beginningless, endless, aimless, a purely elemental process, or does it have a rational final end? Does such an im or absolute good (that is, God) exist, and is this good realizable *in everything* (the Kingdom of heaven – God in all), or does nature present an *eternal* limit for its realization and is it in itself only a subjective, chimerical ideal? For Christianity there can be only *one reply* to this, a reply that requires the fulfilment of the eschatological promises.'

"But for that reason it is important if, in answer to the question: **where is the promise of His Coming?**, we can indicate in the prophecies of Revelation concerning the future destinies of the world much that has already been fulfilled… Especially important, of course, are all the indications that the course of world events foretold thousands of years before followed precisely that path which was sketched in the visions of Revelation.

"Thus both the *ignorance* of the exact time of the end of the world process and a certain *knowledge* of the course of separate phases in it have one and the same aim, that is: to support faith in people, to strengthen their work in the building up of God's work and in the constant preservation of their readiness to appear at the last judgement."[10]

It should also be pointed out that the Lord Himself has reserved to Himself the right to change the times of the fulfilment of the prophecies in accordance with the way in which men respond to His words. Thus He changed the time of the destruction of Nineveh, as conveyed through the Prophet Jonah. And through the Prophet Jeremiah He says: **The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, If that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, If it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.** (Jeremiah 18.7-10).

"You seem a little frightened," wrote Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich to a correspondent. "You have read the Revelation of Saint John and now you are overcome with fear. It seems to you that the worst horrors described there refer exactly to our time. Someone has interpreted for you that those fearsome dragons and beasts are already in the world – both the red dragon in the form of socialism, and the black, ten-horned one in the form of freemasonry, and the two-headed one in the form of heresies…

[10] Tikhomirov, op. cit., pp. 539-40.

"The Apocalypse is the book which, I think, has a prophetic meaning for all Christian generations until the end of time. This is why each generation has applied the meaning of that book to its own time. At any point in time, some beast or other has always reared its head against Christ's faith. Armored with all the weapons of the world and godlessness, each of those beasts rose, inflated itself, roamed, spewed poison, but in the end, each of those beats fell apart and was scattered into ashes. And each time the Almighty Christ remained the Victor over each appearing beast of the apocalypse.

"Thus it was throughout the ages; thus it will be in the last times, before God's Judgement. Read carefully what the seer of the Apocalypse says – how all the beasts and all the dragons and all the authorities of lies will rise against the Lamb of God will defeat them all because that Lamb is the Lord of lords and the King of kings.

"What else do you want aside from such a guarantee of Christ's victory? Christ is represented as the Lamb here. In worldly wars for property and land, one never knows ahead of time who will win, and still, many warriors on both sides fight bravely and with hope. And we lead a spiritual warfare, where our victory has already been guaranteed by God Himself. It has been prophesied, foretold and confirmed by many victories which have already taken place; victories of the undefeatable Christ over all the apostles of lies and organizations of darkness.

"Is this the last one? Who knows? He has said He has said, 'Nobody knows that day or hour, neither the angels in heaven, but My Father alone.' Is this the last war for Christ and against Christ? Even if it was the last one, let us rejoice and be glad all the more! Because even though the battles of that last war will be the heaviest, the wreaths will be the brightest. The last war will bring the last and most magnificent victory of the Lamb. Who among Christians would not wish to be a partaker of that very victory of victories?

"So fear not. The victory of Christ's faith has already been established as stronger than the foundations of the universe. According to His will, He is delaying His final victory; perhaps so that as great a number as possible of human eyes can see it, both from heaven and from earth, and so that as great a number as possible of hearts can rejoice in it."[11]

Attitudes to the End

Now catastrophic events, the fall of empires and the destruction of the old order, fill the worldly man who has pinned his hopes on this order with gloom and despondency. He has no abiding city that cannot be moved, no treasure that cannot be broken into and stolen. And so the Day of the Lord

[11] Velimirovich, "To the 'Brotherhood of Saint John', - about Apocalyptic Events in our Time", Fr. Milorad Loncar, *Missionary Letters of Saint Nikolai Velimirovich*, Grayslake, Il.: New Gracanica Monastery, 2009,.pp. 109-111.

must come upon him **as a thief in the night** (I Thessalonians 5.2), **as darkness and not as light** (Amos 5.18).

It is not so with the Christian. His conversation is in heaven, so his thoughts will not perish with the earth (cf. Psalm 145.3-4). He rejoices in the spoiling of his goods, for he knows that he has **in heaven a better and an enduring substance** (Hebrews 10.34). He rejoices even in the death of his body, for he knows that **if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven** (II Corinthians 5.1-2).

And in general we may say that that which is a cause of sorrow for the carnal mind is a cause of rejoicing for the Christian, and vice-versa. For, as the Lord said: **When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh** (Luke 21.28). And again: **Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy** (John 17.20).

This is not to say, of course, that the Christian in no way participates in the suffering of the world. But he evaluates both his and the world's suffering from a different, other-worldly point of view, discerning its significance in the context of Divine Providence and Judgement, as opening up or cutting off the path of salvation for men. For he sees that if men accept their suffering as just, and as a cross sent from God for the purification of their sins, then by faith and repentance they can use their cross to enter, with the good thief, into the Kingdom of heaven. But if, on the other hand, they see no sense in their suffering and add to their other sins the sins of murmuring and blasphemy, then, with the bad thief, they will go down to hell. In this way the Cross is, as the kontakion of the Ninth Hour says, "a balance-beam of justice". And the Christian, in contemplating it, humbles himself with a godly sorrow for his own and other men's sins, and escapes through this purifying sorrow into the joy of the age to come.

"Thanks to the crushing of earthly hopes," wrote Prince Eugene Troubetskoy at the beginning of the Russian revolution, "the greatest shift takes place in the spiritual life: human thoughts, wishes and hopes are transferred from one plane of existence to another. And in this shift there appear the greatest creative forces. It is precisely in catastrophic epochs that the human heart gives its best to the world... For those chosen souls who become tempered in trials, not only trials, but also offences can be useful. But woe to those through whom offences come..."[12]

[12] Troubetskoy, "Catastrophic Epochs and the Christian Understanding of the End of the World", *Posev*, February, 1984, no. 2 (1321), p. 53 (in Russian).

Some epochs have a particular significance for the life of the Church. Thus the triumph of St. Constantine brought the Church out of the catacombs and opened a vast new field to her missionary endeavours. And, in the opposite direction, the Russian revolution sent the Church back into the catacombs and threatened her complete annihilation. For just as Constantine's victory ushered in a kind of resurrection before the General Resurrection, so Russia's defeat has been a judgement before the Last Judgement – for **judgement must begin at the House of God** (I Peter 4.17).

The Nature of Prophetic Visions

St. Theophylactus of Nicomedia writes: "The prophets receive prophecies from God, but not as they want, but as the Spirit of God works; they would be fully conscious of, and understood, the prophetic word sent down to them, but they did not give explanations."[13] Consequently, prophecies in general, and the Apocalypse in particular are exceptionally difficult to understand.

Lev Tikhomirov explains the main reason for this difficulty as follows: "The basic aim of contemplation and revelation consists, not in the communication to us of information about the future, but *about that which is hidden* in general. This hidden content consists in everything that is supernatural, in everything in which our link with the spiritual and divine world is discovered. Of course, when the contemplative sees himself or humanity before his spiritual gaze in this material and tangible link with spheres of another order, this can give him insight also into the future, but in the same degree as into the past and the present. Before him there opens up not this or that particular time, but the very *link between man and the spiritual and divine world*, on which his destiny depends to a much greater degree than on the material world, and which in his usual condition he can in no wise feel and which he therefore does not take into account in his guesses and calculations. Such is the essence of revelation and contemplation, which are sometimes even given to a man not for communication to other people, but for him personally, as a consequence of his lofty spiritual life and as a help for it and strengthening of it in the future. But we, it goes without saying, come to know only those revelations which are given not for the contemplative personally but for communication to others. Here, too, however, the contemplation and revelation that is given to people is aimed, for the greater part, at giving a representation of the mysteriously close link between our life here and all its events with the actions and aims of the powers of a different world – a spiritual or divine world. This needs to be known only by him who desires to maintain this link consciously, to conform himself with it, to struggle with some of the powers revealed to him, and enter into union with others. In this case the question of the future, whatever it may be, is hardly relevant. This union or this struggle is not necessary for the future, but *constantly*, as a means towards a healthy spiritual life. Sometimes, perhaps, it may even seem more important to the contemplative to know about the past,

[13] St. Theophylactus, quoted in Fomin and Fomin, op. cit., volume I, p. 12.

about which he through ignorance or evil will has taken an incorrect position in regard to the power of the spiritual or divine world that needs correction.

"These are the main reasons why prophetic contemplations and revelations are not clear. They are supplemented by secondary reasons which depend on the character of the condition in which the contemplation is received, and on the difficulty of expressing it in usual human language, if it does not have as its main aim the giving of a positive message to people.

"A prophecy is completely clear if it has as its aim the communication to people of a demand of the definitive Will of God or a warning to them to keep away from mistaken acts in this or that particular case. Thus the Prophet Jeremiah in the name of God insistently advised the Jewish people and King Zedekiah not to wage war with Nebuchadnezzar and submit to him without a fight. Thus the Saviour foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, giving the direct advice to flee and hide when the signs of the time of the destruction appeared. Thanks to this the Christians were saved in the year of the desolation of Judaea. But when the prophecy touches the general destinies of the world or its general condition, the prophetic contemplation is only in exceptional cases completely clear, as it was, for example, with Daniel in relation to the times of the coming of the Messiah. But generally speaking the link between humanity and the supernatural world makes it inevitable that prophetic revelations should be obscure.

"That which takes place in the supernatural spheres cannot be expressed clearly in human language. When the Apostle Paul was speaking about his ascension to the third heaven he directly declared that what he had heard there could not be expressed in our language. When we read the Apostle John's description of what takes place in the heavens, we see images which it is evidently impossible to understand literally: he speaks about lampstands, about altars, about the exterior appearance of angels, their wings, etc. But it is understood that nothing of the sort exists in the heavens, but that which does exist there, that which the seer really did see, is such as can be conveyed only symbolically, in a certain likeness to material objects.

"Thus *symbolism* is an inevitable form of such contemplation and revelation. The seer as it were translates into material language that which exists in reality not in material, but in some completely different forms.

"It goes without saying that this symbolism which requires interpretation makes the seer's communications unclear, especially for people who have not personally experienced the condition of the contemplative…

"Therefore if Revelation is given to enlighten the destinies of the world, it is of necessity symbolic. Moreover, the symbol sometimes remains incomprehensible even for the contemplative himself: **I was amazed at my vision**, says Daniel, **and did not understand it** (Daniel 8. 27). And so its

significance is *sometimes* explained to the prophet in the course of the vision itself, but not always.

"Therefore in the reading of apocalyptic prophecies a multitude of perplexities and contradictions arise in the attempt to understand them, although, generally speaking, the understanding of the symbolism of contemplative images is made easier by the fact that the prophets had very many symbolic visions, and so by putting them together we can receive some idea of the significance of the symbols."[14]

The Interpretation

The Apocalypse presents a synoptic view of this supreme struggle in the interaction of several symbolic figures. The main protagonists are, on the one hand, the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the woman clothed with the sun, His Holy Church; and on the other, the devil and his evil minions – the first beast, the false prophet and the whore of Babylon. The focus switches from earth to heaven, from deepest antiquity to the age to come.

However, the chief emphasis, according to our interpretation, is on Europe, the Middle East and Russia in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, when, as Elder Nectarius of Optina put it, "the world will be girded with iron and paper" – the iron curtain of Soviet communism and the paper deals of Western capitalism and ecumenism. It is the age in which the true Church flees into the wilderness of obscurity and suffering, and in which evil of the most radical kind sprawls triumphantly on the former capitals of Christian piety. But this is also the age, according to the prophecies of the saints, in which the most complete reversal will take place, **not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord** (Zechariah 4.6), when the beast of communism (severely wounded now, but still alive), the false prophet of scientific materialism and evolutionism and the whore of Judaeo-Masonic ecumenism will all be destroyed in the mighty conflagration of the Third World War. Then the Church will arise, and **the Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world**. And **then shall the end come** (Matthew 24.14): during the apostasy of the final, Laodicean period of Church history, the personal Antichrist, the false messiah and king of the Jews, will take power and initiate the most universal and cruellest persecution of the Church, which will be cut short only by the Second Coming of Christ, the General Resurrection from the dead and the Last and Most Terrible Judgement.

This last period in the history of the world is divided, according to our interpretation, into three parts: (i) *the reign of the collective Antichrist* of Soviet power, which has not yet come to an end, (ii) *the triumph of Orthodoxy and the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world,* which will come after a Third World War, and (iii) *the reign of the personal Antichrist, followed by the Second Coming of Christ, the Last Judgement and the General Resurrection from the dead.*

[14] Tikhomirov, op. cit., pp. 542-43, 544.

This general schema is most succinctly revealed in the words of the holy Russian New Martyr Jacob Fyodorovich Arkatov (+1991), who said: "All the prophecies speak not about only one time for the reign of the Antichrist, but about three sections of the last time: the first period is called **the beginning of sorrows**, according to the prophetic words of the Saviour, or **the apostasy**, according to the Apostle Paul, while in the Apocalypse of the Apostle John it is marked as the coming out and reigning of the beast from the sea with his head-followers. The second section of the last time is **the beast was and is not** or the time of the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world. And finally, the third period is really the time of the reign of the Antichrist. The Saviour calls it **the end**, the beginning of which is the placing of **the abomination of desolation**. The Apostle John calls it the coming out of **the beast from the abyss**, which is the eighth in the dynasty of the beasts and is of the number of the seven, while the Apostle Paul calls it the appearance of **the man of sin.**"[15]

Concerning the question of literal versus symbolical meanings, Fr. Seraphim Rose notes that "many would-be interpreters of Scripture go astray precisely on this point, whether by a too-literal understanding (as in the case of the Protestant Fundamentalists who come close to believing that *everything* in the Bible is 'literally' true) or a too-free interpretation (as in the case of the liberals who dismiss everything difficult to believe as 'symbolic' or 'allegorical'). In the Orthodox interpretation of Scripture these two levels of meaning, the literal and symbolical, are often intertwined...

"The visions of the Apocalypse… sometimes… present heavenly realities in forms adapted to the understanding of the seer (the vision of Christ in chapter 1; of heaven in chs. 4-7; of the future age in chs. 21-22); sometimes they present allegorical pictures of the Church and her life (the **woman clothed with the sun** in ch. 12, the **thousand years** of the Church's existence in ch. 20), or of specific beings that war against the Church (the dragon in ch. 12, the two beasts of ch. 13), or of future events, whether general (the four horsemen of ch. 6) or specific (the seven last plagues of ch. 15)."[16]

At this point we should consider the objection that the Apocalypse is not a truly prophetic book, but simply non-historical allegory; that in this book, in the words of Fr. Alexander Kolesnikov, "there is no foretelling of events and processes in Church and world history, but there is represented in symbols the inner struggle of the soul of the individual Christian between good and evil, God and Satan".[17] This appears to have been the view of, for example, Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) of Kiev, first president of the Russian Church Abroad, who said "that the Apocalypse contains in itself, not a foretelling of definite events, as is usually thought, but instruction for the

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[15] Fr. (now Bishop) Victor Pivovarov, "The Life of the Catacomb Ascetic Jacob Fyodorovich Arkatov", http://www.omolenko.com/texts/arkatov.htm (in Russian).
[16] Rose, op. cit., pp. 28-29, 30.
[17] Kolesnikov, *The Seer of the Future*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1972, p. 12 (in Russian).

Christians, exhorting them to martyrdom. It depicts the struggle between good and evil, which takes places in all generations of human history and usually leads to the triumph of evil on earth."[18]

Now this is certainly *part* of the meaning of the book. But that definite prophecies of future events are also contained in it is made clear at the very beginning, where the seer is told: **Write the things which thou has seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter** (1.19). And again: **Come up hither, and I will thee things which must be hereafter** (4.1). And: **The Lord God sent His angel to show unto His servants the things which must be shortly hereafter** (22.6).

This is no "realized eschatology", but a clear reference to future events. And if it be objected that the end of the world and the last judgement did not come *shortly* thereafter, the fulfilment of the prophecy did, nevertheless, *begin* in St. John's time – and in any case, in the eyes of God **one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day** (II Peter 3.8). Therefore the whole period between the First and Second Comings of Christ may indeed be called a short period in eschatological terms.

Like other prophecies of the Old and New Testaments, the Apocalypse refers to events in both the near and the distant future, both what was shortly to happen in the Church towards the end of the first century A.D., and what is to come to pass at the end of the world and even after the last and most terrible judgement.

Sometimes a single prophecy refers *simultaneously* to near and far events. For example, the Lord's prophecies in Matthew 24 refer, according to St. Ephraim the Syrian, "to the punishment of Jerusalem and at the same time to the end of the world."[19]

Again, Daniel's famous prophecy of **the abomination of desolation** (Daniel 9.27) refers simultaneously to the Romans' desecration of the Jewish Temple in 70 A.D., and to the enthronement of the Antichrist at the end of the world, and perhaps also to other acts of apostasy in world history.

Similarly, it is the profound conviction of the True Orthodox Christians of Russia that since 1917 we are living in the times of the Apocalypse and that the prophecies concerning the woman fleeing into the wilderness, the two beasts, the whore of Babylon, etc. can be interpreted as referring to different aspects of life under the Soviet (collective) Antichrist. At the same time these prophecies may be fulfilled again, and still more precisely, under the Jewish (personal) Antichrist, who will be enthroned in Jerusalem seven years before

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[18] Archbishop Nicon (Rklitsky), *The Life and Works of his Beatitude Anthony, Metropolitan of Kiev and Galich*, Montreal, 1965, volume V, p. 135 (in Russian).

[19] St. Ephraim, *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, XVIII, 14; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1966, p. 324 (in French).

the end of the world. One purpose of the present work is to acquaint the general reader with the remarkable prophecies and interpretations of the holy Fathers and Martyrs of the Russian Church during the last two centuries. For it is the Russian Church which has both borne the chief brunt of antichristian persecution in this period and given birth to the greatest number of prophets capable of interpreting the signs of the times. These include Saints Seraphim of Sarov, Ambrose of Optina, John of Kronstadt and many of the holy new martyrs and confessors.

Thus, as Tikhomirov writes, "besides the usual symbolism, we must bear in mind that various events in the world are so-called *types* of other events which follow them. In the type, which has an exceptionally great significance in Christian exegesis, we come across one of the most mysterious of the world's phenomena."[20]

Having said that, there is no doubt that the *dogmatic* content of the Apocalypse is hardly less important that its prophetic, eschatological content. Thus in it we find very valuable witnesses to the dogmas of the Holy Trinity, the Divinity of Christ and especially the dogma of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. For in our present age, when all the Christian dogmas are under ferocious attack, the witness of the Apocalypse to the nature of the relationship between Christ and His Church is especially valuable. Thus here we see Christ exhorting, praising, warning and comforting local Churches, promising eternal life to some and threatening others with excommunication. And here, too, we find many references to the liturgical life of the early Church, to the Eucharistic Sacrifice, to candles and vestments and incense, to the prayers of the Saints and the intimate interpenetration of the Heavenly and Earthly Churches. In all this we find confirmation of the Faith and practice of the Orthodox Church and refutation of the heresies of Catholicism and Protestantism.

Moreover, we see in the Apocalypse that the Church is One, united through the One Faith under a single Head, Christ; and that those who fall away into various sects and heresies are not part of the One Church but cut off from both her and her Head. This is a valuable witness against the chief heresy of our time, ecumenism, which denies the dogma of the One Church. Finally, we are given a vision of the Church in glory beyond space and time, which, in our age, when the vision of the Church has become so trivialised, is not the least of the book's many treasures.

Again, the prophetic and dogmatic content of the Apocalypse is intimately connected with its *pastoral* content. Since we live in the last times, in constant peril of being at any moment cut off from Christ and His Holy Church, the Chief Shepherd addresses us with words charged with pastoral love and concern. He exhorts us to flee the moral laxity and indifference to the truth of the false religions and culture of our time, symbolized by the figure of the

[20] Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 543.

whore of Babylon, and to stand firm against the attempts of the false political and scientific structures of our time, symbolized by the two beasts, to accept the seal of the Antichrist.

He fills us with a godly fear by depicting the torments that await the impious, but strengthens us with hope in the eventual complete triumph of truth over falsehood and the indescribable joy of the life of the age to come. The choice is set before us in the starkest possible terms. But lest we grow faint-hearted at the enormity of the challenge, He shows us that He and the whole might of the Heavenly Church are ready to help us at any moment.

Some words on the structure of the work. With this question are bound up many basic problems of interpretation. For it is precisely "with the understanding of the plan of the Apocalypse that the difficulties begin. The basic question comes down to: are the events foretold in the Apocalypse ordered in one consequential series, or are we dealing with several repeated series of events in which the same events are enlightened from various sides (the theory of 'recapitulation')".[21]

I believe that the Apocalypse most naturally divides into three major prophecies, each of which ends with the end of the world or, in the case of the third prophecy, the life of the age to come. In this I follow Lev Tikhomirov, who writes: "a chronological succession of events seems to be noticeable in three parts of the Apocalypse: 1) in the instruction to the seven churches of Asia, 2) in the breaking of the seals, 3) in the seven trumpet voices and the seven vials of the wrath of God".[22]

The first prophecy, "The Seven Churches of Asia", relates in the first place to the spiritual life of the Seven Local Churches of Asia Minor at the end of the first century A.D. According to an interpretation of Tikhomirov and Archbishop Averky of Jordanville that I shall develop in detail, the prophecy also refers to seven phases in the life of the Church as a whole from the first century to the Antichrist. The second prophecy, "The Seven Seals", describes, according to the present interpretation, the history of the Church in the last times, from 1914 to the Second Coming of Christ. The third prophecy, "The Seven Vials", is the least historical, or, to put it another way, the most meta-historical; for the main figures symbolize the True Church, the False Church, False Politics and False Science in all ages and places. At the same time, they clearly relate to historical events of the last times described in the two earlier prophecies, but in a more generalized way. Thus the woman fleeing into the wilderness, while referring to the True Church in all ages fleeing from the world, also recalls more specifically the Philadelphian Church of chapter three and her sufferings. Again, the beast who destroys the whore and is in

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[21] Bishop Cassian (Bezobrazov), *Christ and the First Christian Generation*, Paris, Moscow, 1996, p. 345; quoted in Fr. Nicholas Kim, *The 1000-year Kingdom*, St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2003, p. 29 (in Russian). The theory of recapitulation goes back to the fourth-century Donatist Bishop Tichonius.

[22] Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 556.

turn destroyed by Christ is clearly the same Antichrist against which the two witnesses prophesy in chapter ten.

Accordingly, I have given an historical interpretation to each of these three parts. The extremely complex symbols of this prophecy may be seen as describing the struggle between **the mystery of godliness** (I Timothy 3.16) and **the mystery of iniquity** (II Thessalonians 2.7) from before the beginning of the visible creation to beyond its end as we know it. For the Apocalypse ultimately goes beyond time and into eternity, "the Eighth Day". It is **the Revelation of Jesus Christ** (1.1), **the Word Who was in the beginning** (John 1.1) and of Whose knowledge there will be no end (John 21.25). That is why, although the passing of time and the emergence of new signs of the times has to some degree increased our knowledge, the Apocalypse remains, for all those still clothed in flesh and blood, a sealed book.

The Sources

The Apocalypse "constitutes as it were a great river formed out of rivers and streams of Old Testament prophecy united into one and falling into the sea of eternity itself".[23] In the following interpretation, therefore, my main source has been Old and New Testament prophecy. In addition, on the principle that the Spirit that speaks through the prophets is one, I have made extensive use of many prophecies of Orthodox saints, and especially of recent saints of the Russian Catacomb Church, which seem to me to illumine passages from the Apocalypse when set next to them. Several of these prophecies refer to a Third World War and a period of peace and plenty immediately after the war but before the reign of the personal Antichrist.

I admit that the conjunction of these prophecies with the Apocalypse is speculative; only time, and the fulfilment of the prophecies themselves, will tell whether it has been successful; and I ask the reader's forgiveness if it turns out to be mistaken in any given case.

As regards commentaries on the Scripture, I have made extensive use of the writings of the holy Fathers and Teachers of the Orthodox Church, including the well-known commentaries of St. Hippolytus, Pope of Rome (about 230) and St. Andrew, Archbishop of Caesarea (fifth century). However, the meaning of the Apocalypse is only partly explained by the interpretations of holy Fathers who lived many centuries before our time. If they had lived in our time, when many of the prophecies are being fulfilled before our eyes, they would undoubtedly have wanted to modify and add to their interpretations to accord with their understanding of contemporary events. For, as Fr. Seraphim Rose notes, "as history proceeds to its end, the meaning of some of the images will become clearer. Archbishop Averky himself notes that some of the image simply cannot be understood yet, while of others (for

[23] Barsov, M. (ed.), *The Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian: A Collection of Patristic and Theological Interpretations*, Simbirsk, 1894, Sergiev Posad, 2000, p. 131 (in Russian).

example, the **locusts** and **horses** of ch. 9) he hazards interpretations based on the 20th-century experience of warfare."[24]

In addition, therefore, to the writings of the early Fathers, I have made use of many articles and observations by contemporary or near-contemporary Church writers who have illumined, as it seems to me, certain passages. Among these I have made extensive use of the commentaries of Bishop Peter of Tomsk, St. John of Kronstadt (+1908), Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava (+1940) and Archbishop Averky of Jordanville (+1976).

Finally, I wish to thank (the now-reposed) Hieromonk Theodoreitos (Mavros) of Mount Athos for his very helpful comments and criticisms of earlier drafts of this book.

July 4/17, 2014.
Holy Tsar-Martyr Nicholas and his Holy Martyred Family.
East House, Beech Hill, Mayford, Woking, Surrey. United Kingdom.

[24] Barsov, op. cit., p. 31.

I. THE FIRST VISION: THE CHURCH IN TIME

Introduction. The First and the Last

1.1. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass.

St. John of Kronstadt writes: "The name Apocalypse, i.e. **the Revelation of Jesus Christ**, signifies the declaration of the mysteries of the future judgement and recompense [and] renovation of the world, **which must shortly come to pass**. **Shortly**, however, in this sense, as St. Andrew of Caesarea says, that something of what is predicted in the Revelation is, so to speak, at hand. But even that which relates to the end of time is not very distant, for a thousand years before God are as yesterday."[25]

One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (II Peter 3.8).

As Nicholas Vasileiades writes, "just as the first book of Holy Scripture, Genesis, is concerned with the *creation of the world*, so the last, the Apocalypse, is concerned with the *consummation of all things*.[26]

The authority for this prophecy is **Jesus Christ**, Who received it from God the Father; for **I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things** (John 8.28).

All prophecy comes from the Father, in the Son, and through the Holy Spirit. It is not given to human nature, unenlightened by the Grace of God, to know the future. That is why the Lord *in His manhood* said of His Second Coming: **Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father** (Mark 13.32), while *in His Divinity* He certainly knew both the day and the hour.

For, as St. Athanasius the Great points out, "after saying **neither the Son** He relates to the disciples the things which will precede that day, and says that this and that will happen, and then the end. Now He that speaks of what will precede that day also has full knowledge of that day which will come after the events foretold. And if He had not known the hour, He would not have pointed to the events preceding it, not knowing when that hour would be... Certainly, then, it is evident that as the Word He knows the hour and the end of all things, although as man He is ignorant of it; for ignorance is proper to man, and especially in these matters."[27]

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[25] St. John of Kronstadt, *The Beginning and End of the Earthly World*. St. Petersburg, 1904, Moscow, 2004, p. 64 (in Russian). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from St. John are from this work.

[26] Vasileiades, *The Apocalypse of John*, Patmos, 1995, p. 21 (in Greek).

[27] St. Athanasius, *Third Discourse against the Arians*, 42-43.

1.1-2. And He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that He saw.

The Revelation was transmitted through an angel to God's servant John the Apostle and Evangelist, who then recorded it for posterity. Such is the mark of all true knowledge. It comes to us from God, through the mediation of His holy servants - angels, apostles and prophets.

Thus St. Ambrose of Optina writes: "All that relates to the creation of the world, the destinies of peoples and the salvation of men has been revealed by the Almighty Lord to chosen holy men, prophets and apostles, who were enlightened by the light of His Divine knowledge, and by whom all this was handed down and written in the Bible, that is, in the books of the Old and New Testaments."[28]

However, in the Holy Scriptures there are **some things hard to understand, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest... unto their own destruction** (II Peter 3.16). Especially is this true of prophecy, which is why **no prophecy is of any private interpretation** (II Peter 1.20). Thus "everything in the Bible which is hidden and unclear has been explained to other holy men chosen by God, pastors and teachers of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" (St. Ambrose).

And yet even the saints trembled on approaching the interpretation of the Apocalypse. For, as St. Hippolytus of Rome writes, "if the blessed prophets who preceded us did not choose to proclaim these things, though they knew them, openly and boldly, lest they should disquiet the souls of men, but recounted them mystically in parables and dark sayings, speaking thus, **Here is the mind that hath wisdom** (17.9), how much greater risk shall we run in venturing to declare openly things spoken by them in obscure terms!"[29] But out of love for their fellow men they did approach the interpretation of this mysterious work, lest Christians should be deprived of the enormous spiritual riches contained within it.

Thus every individual Christian on approaching the Scriptures, and a fortiori the Apocalypse, is in the position of the Ethiopian eunuch, who, on being asked whether he understood what he was reading, replied: **How can I, unless some man should guide me?** (Acts 8.31). So he has recourse to the pastors and teachers of the Church, from whom he receives the true understanding of Scripture, the interpretation that has been handed down in the Church from the earliest Christian generations. Every succeeding generation of Christian teachers builds on this sacred deposit of inspired scriptural interpretation, making clear "what is hidden and unclear in the

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[28] Quoted in Sergius Nilus, *Holiness Under a Bushel*, Forestville, Ca.: St. Elias Publications, 1977 (in Russian).

[29] St. Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 29.

Bible, not according to their own understanding, but as it is explained in the books of men inspired by God and enlightened with the light of Divine knowledge,... the books of the holy and God-inspired Fathers of the Orthodox Church" (St. Ambrose).

It is on the basis of this "consensus of the Fathers" that we know that the writer of the Apocalypse was the Apostle John. Thus Archbishop Averky writes: "The writer of the Apocalypse calls himself **John** (1.1, 4.9). In the common belief of the Church, this was the holy Apostle John, the beloved disciple of Christ, who for the height of his teaching concerning God the Word received the distinctive title of 'Theologian'. To his inspired pen belongs also the fourth canonical Gospel and the three Catholic Epistles. This belief of the Church is justified both by facts indicated in the Apocalypse itself, and by many internal and external signs.

"1) The writer of the Apocalypse calls himself **John** at the very beginning, saying that to him was given the Revelation of Jesus Christ (1.1). Further, greeting the seven churches of Asia Minor, he again calls himself **John** (1.4). Later he again calls himself **John**, saying that he was in **the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ** (1.9). From the history of the apostles it is known that it is precisely St. John the Theologian who was subjected to exile on the island of Patmos. And finally, at the end of the Apocalypse, the writer again calls himself **John** (22.8). In the second verse of the first chapter, he calls himself an eyewitness of Jesus Christ (cf. I John 1.3).

"The opinion that the Apocalypse was written by a certain 'Presbyter John' is totally without foundation. The very existence of this 'Presbyter John' as a person separate from the Apostle John is rather dubious. The only testimony which gives reason to speak about 'Presbyter John' is a passage from a work of Papias which has been preserved by the historian Eusebius. It is extremely indefinite and give opportunity only for guesses and suppositions which contradict each other. Likewise the opinion is totally without foundation that ascribes the writing of the Apocalypse to John Mark, that is, the Evangelist Mark. Even more absurd is the opinion of the Roman presbyter Gaius (3rd century) that the Apocalypse was written by the heretic Cerinthus.

"2) The second proof that the Apocalypse belongs to the Apostle John the Theologian is its similarity to the Gospel and Epistles of John, not only in spirit but also in style, and especially in several characteristic expressions. Thus, for example, the apostolic preaching is called here **testimony** or **witness** (1.2, 9; 20.4; cf. John 1.7; 3.11; 21.24; I John 5.9-10). The Lord Jesus Christ is called **the Word** (19.13; cf. John 1.1-14; I John 1.1) as well as **the Lamb** (5.6; 17.14; cf. John 1.36). The prophetic words of Zechariah, **And they shall look on Him Whom they pierced** (12.10), are cited identically both in the Gospel and in the Apocalypse in accordance with the translation of the Seventy (1.7 and John 19.37).

"Some have found that the language of the Apocalypse is supposedly to be distinguished from the language of the other writings of the Apostle John. This difference is easily explained, both by the difference of content and by the conditions in which the writings of the holy Apostle had their origin. Although the holy apostle knew Greek well, still, finding himself in exile far from the living conversational language, he naturally placed in the Apocalypse the seal of the powerful influence of the Hebrew language, being himself a Jew by birth. For the objective reader of the Apocalypse there is no doubt that on its whole content there lies the seal of the great spirit of the apostle of love and contemplation.

"3) All the ancient as well as the later patristic testimonies acknowledge St. John the Theologian to be the author of the Apocalypse. His disciple, Papias of Hierapolis, calls the writer of the Apocalypse 'Presbyter John', a name which the holy apostle gives to himself in his own Epistles (II John 1, III John 1).

"The testimony of St. Justin the Martyr is also important. Before his conversion to Christianity he lived for a long time in Ephesus, the city where the great apostle himself lived for a long time and reposed.

"Furthermore, many holy Fathers cite passages from the Apocalypse as from a Divinely inspired book belonging to St. John the Theologian. Such quotations are to be found in the works of St. Irenaeus of Lyons, the disciple of St. Polycarp of Smyrna, who himself was a disciple of St. John the Theologian; St. Hippolytus, Pope of Rome and disciple of Irenaeus, who even wrote an apology on the Apocalypse; Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen likewise acknowledge the holy Apostle John as the writer of the Apocalypse. In the same way Ephraim the Syrian, Epiphanius, Basil the Great, Hilary, Athanasius the Great, Gregory the Theologian, Didymus, Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome were convinced of this. The thirty-third canon of the Council of Carthage, ascribing the Apocalypse to St. John the Theologian, places it in the rank of the other canonical books."(Archbishop Averky)

1.3. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein; for the time is at hand.

"The book of the Apocalypse has, consequently, not only a prophetic, but also a moral significance. The meaning of these words is as follows: Blessed is he who, on reading this book, will prepare himself by his life and deeds of piety for eternity; for the translation to eternity is near for each one of us." (Archbishop Averky)

St. Barsanuphius of Optina wrote: "In the Apocalypse it is said: **Blessed is he that readeth the words of this book.** If this is written, it means that it is really so, for the words of the Sacred Scripture are the words of the Holy Spirit. But in what does this blessedness consist? The more so, in that people may object that we do not understand anything of what is written. Perhaps it

consists in the consolation to be gained from reading the Divine words. One can also think as follows: that which is not understood by us now will become understandable when the time described comes to pass. Judge for yourselves. Who reads the Apocalypse now? Almost exclusively those who live in monasteries and in theological academies and seminaries - they have to. But in the world hardly anyone reads it. Clearly, then, he who reads the Apocalypse before the end of the world will be truly blessed, for he will understand what is taking place. And in understanding he will prepare himself. In reading he will see in the events described in the Apocalypse one or other of the events contemporary with him."[30]

New Hieromartyr Bishop Mark (Novoselov) writes: "**Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy** concerning the future destinies of the Church and **keep those things that are written therein**, cries the holy seer of her great and wondrous destinies! Blessed is he who, attending to the Lord's revelation concerning the destiny of the Church of God, does not doubt in the truth of her triumph over her enemies or in the final, complete victory of her Founder and supreme Master over the ancient serpent, the age-old slayer of man, who rose up against the Kingdom of God and never ceases to arm himself against Him with all the powers and resources of hell! Blessed is he who hopes on the almighty power of the meek Lamb, slain for the salvation of the world, and who does not fall away from Him amidst the terrible temptations that have befallen the Church, but rather takes inspiration from his participation in her universal triumph, which will be revealed at the end of the age!"[31]

1.4. John to the seven churches which are in Asia.

"The number seven is usually taken as an expression of fulness. St. John addresses here only the seven churches with which he, as one who lived in Ephesus, was in especially close and frequent contact. But in these seven he addresses at the same time the Christian Church as a whole." (Archbishop Averky)

St. Cyprian of Carthage writes: "In the New Testament seven sons signify seven churches. For Paul also wrote to seven Churches (Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae and Thessalonica), and in the Apocalypse (1.4) seven churches are mentioned… The days of Genesis are seven, and the angels who are before the face of God are seven, according to the words of the Angel Raphael in the book of Tobit (12.15). And the lampstand in the tabernacle has seven lamps (Exodus 25.31), and God's eyes watching over the world are seven. And Zechariah's stone has seven facets (Zechariah 3.9), and

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[30] Sergius Fomin, *Russia before the Second Coming*, Sergiev Posad, 1993, p. 79 (in Russian).
[31] Hieromartyr Mark, *Letters to Friends*. Moscow: St. Tikhon's Theological Institute, 1994, p. 293 (in Russian).

the spirits are seven, and the pillars on which, according to Solomon, Wisdom has built her house, are seven!"[32]

Samson, according to St. Ephraim the Syrian, "carried seven cedars as an image of seven-rayed grace."[33] And Delilah cut off seven locks of his hair, in which consisted his extraordinary strength (Judges 16.14-19).[34]

"By these seven churches," says the Venerable Bede, "he writes to every church, for universality is usually denoted by the number seven, in that the whole time of this age is evolved from seven days."[35] For "those numbers which the divine Scripture more eminently commends, as the seventh, or tenth, or twelfth [signify], for the most part, either the whole course of time, or the perfection of anything..., as **seven times in a day I sing praise unto Thee** (Psalm 98.164), is nothing else than, **His praise was ever in my mouth** (Psalm 32.2). And they are of the same value also when they are multiplied either by ten, as seventy and seven hundred, in which case, the seventy years of Jerusalem may be taken spiritually for the whole time during which the Church is among aliens; or by themselves, as ten by ten is a hundred, and twelve by twelve is a hundred and forty-four, by which number the whole body of the saints is denoted in the Apocalypse."[36]

Lev Tikhomirov writes: "In the person [of the Asian churches] the Saviour addresses the whole Universal Church in seven manfestations and moments of her existence".[37]

If the number seven is an expression of fullness, then the seven Churches express the fullness of the *One*, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, which is, as it were, the Eighth, Universal Church dwelling in each of the seven local ones.[38]

Again, St. Gregory Palamas points out there are seven resurrections from the dead recorded in Holy Scripture before the Lord's own (III Kings 17.22; IV Kings 4; IV Kings 13; Luke 7; Mark 5 and Luke 8; John 11 and Matthew 27.52-52). The number seven is to be honoured, he says, because it leads to the number eight, which signifies eternity. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the

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[32] St. Cyprian, *Witness against the Jews in Three Books*, I, 20.
[33] St. Ephraim, *Sermon* 79.
[34] In the Israeli town of Esadot, where this took place, archaeologists have discovered seven locks of hair which are about three thousand years old and which biochemical analysis has shown to have belonged to a man with a muscular strength 70 to 100 times the normal (*Vestnik* of the Synod of the Latvian Orthodox Church, N 2, 1996; reported in *Pravoslavnaia Rus'*, N 24 (1573), December 15/28, 1996, p. 16).
[35] Bede, *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, P.L. 93; translated by Edward Marshall, *The Explanation of the Apocalypse by Venerable Bede*, Oxford: Parker, 1878. Unless other wise indicated, all quotations from the Venerable Bede are from this work.
[36] Bede, *Explanatio Apocalypsis, Epistola ad Eusebium*.
[37] Tikhomirov, *The Religio-Philosophical Foundations of History*, Moscow, 1997, p. 557 (in Russian).
[38] Hieromartyr Victorinus of Patau, *Commentary on the Apocalypse, M.P.L.* 5, coll. 320B-D.

Church, rose on the eighth day and His resurrection was the eighth in Holy Scripture.[39]

"The great light of the Lord's Transfiguration is the mystery of the eighth day, that is, of the age to come, which is manifested after this world, which was made in six days, has ceased, and the sixfold action of our senses has been transcended. We have five senses, but if you add speech, it brings the number of ways in which our senses work to six. The kingdom of God promised to those who are worthy surpasses not only our senses but also our words. The seventh day is honoured with blessed rest from the activities of our sixfold senses, and after this pause, the kingdom of God shines forth on the eighth day, by virtue of a higher energy."[40]

1.4. Grace unto you, from Him Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come.

St. Andrew of Caesarea writes: "Grace to you and peace from the Tri-Personal Divinity. The phrase **Who is** signifies the Father, Who said to Moses: **I AM HE WHO IS** (Exodus 3.14). The expression **Who was** signifies the Word, Who **was in the beginning with God** (John 1.2). The phrase **Who is to come** indicates the Comforter, Who always descends upon the Church's children in Holy Baptism and is to descend in all fullness in the future age (Acts 2)."[41]

The Venerable Bede writes: "Grace he desires from us, and peace from God, the eternal Father, and from the sevenfold Spirit, and from Jesus Christ, Who gave testimony to the Father in His Incarnation. He names the Son in the third place, as he was to speak further of Him. He names Him also the last in order, as He is the first and the last."

Grace descended upon the assembled Church at Pentecost, revealing to them for the first time with full clarity the dogma of the One God in Three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is therefore fitting that the first mention of the Holy Trinity in the Apocalypse should be linked with the first mention of the Church. For the Church is **the pillar and ground of the Truth** (I Timothy 3.15), and the many-personed reflection of the Trihypostatic Divinity.

1.4. And from the seven spirits which are before His throne.

"By these **seven spirits** it is most natural to understand the seven main angels, who are mentioned in Tobit 12.15. St. Andrew of Caesarea, however, understands by these the angels ruling the seven churches. But many interpreters understand by this expression the Holy Spirit Himself, Who reveals Himself in seven main gifts (cf. Isaiah 11.1-3)." (Archbishop Averky)

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[39] St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 17, M.P.G.* 151, coll. 229.
[40] St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 34*, 6.
[41] *Interpretation of the Apocalypse by St. Andrew, Archbishop of Caesarea*, Moscow, 1898 (in Russian translation). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from St. Andrew are from this work.

The angels **are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth** (Zechariah 4.10). They both intercede on our behalf (Matthew 18.10) and convey our prayers to God. It is not that God needs intermediaries, nor that there is not only one Mediator between God and man, as being both God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ (I Timothy 2.5). The mediation of angels is simply the natural consequence of the living bond of faith and love existing between the Church in heaven and the Church on earth (Hebrews 12.22-24).

St. Gregory Palamas writes: "Saint Basil says the energies of the Spirit are many. But on this account there are not many Gods or many Spirits, for these realities are processions, manifestations and natural energies of the one Spirit, and in each case the Agent is one. When the heterodox call these creatures, they degrade the Spirit of God to a creature sevenfold. But let their shame be sevenfold, for a prophet again says of the energies, **These are the seven eyes that look upon all the earth** [Zechariah 4.10]. And it is so written in Revelation, and clearly demonstrates to the faithful that these are the Holy Spirit."[42]

1.5. And from Jesus Christ, Who is the faithful witness, and the first-begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

"For, having witnessed before Pontius Pilate, He was **faithful in all His words** (Psalm 144.13)." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

The Lord came into the world **to witness to the truth** - the truth, namely, that He is **the Christ, the Son of God** (John 18.37, 20.31). And he proved the truth of His words by His Resurrection from the dead, becoming **the first-fruits of them that slept** (I Corinthians 15.20). **Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth** (Philippians 2.9-11; cf. I Timothy 6.16).

"In the greeting of St. John the Theologian to the Churches the Trihypostatic Divinity, from Whom grace and peace are bestowed, is represented symbolically. Thus when John speaks of the Hypostasis of the Father, He mentions Him **Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come**, that is, contains the beginning, the middle and the end of all that exists. When He speaks of the Holy Spirit, he mentions **the seven spirits which are before the throne** of the Father, and this signifies the gifts of the life-giving Spirit. But when he speaks of the second Person of the Trihypostatic Divinity, he calls Him **Jesus Christ, Who is the faithful witness** (for He witnessed before the sanhedrin and Pilate to the fact that He was the true King and Son of God, sitting at the right hand of the Father and being about to come on the clouds of heaven), **the first-begotten from the dead** (for He is the resurrection of life)

[42] St. Gregory Palamas, *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, chaps. 70, 71:165, 167. In *The Orthodox New Testament*, vol. 2, Buena Vista, CO: Holy Apostles Convent, 1999, p. 551.

and **the prince of the kings of the earth** (as **King of kings and Lord of lords**)." (St. John of Kronstadt)

St. Athanasius writes: "He is said to be **the First-begotten from the dead**, not that He died before us, for we had died first; but because having undergone death for us and abolished it, He was the first to rise as a man, for our sake raising His own Body. Henceforth, He having risen, we, too, from Him and because of Him rise in due course from the dead."[43]

Prince of the kings of the earth. A. Zhdanov writes: "This second (closely connected with the first) consequence of the witness of the cross of Christ in relation to Him is the vesting in the highest royal power over all the lords of the earth. In the Old Testament through the lips of the prophets God announced the Messiah: **I shall make Him My first-born, higher than the kings of the earth** (Psalm 88.28); **I shall give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession** (Psalm2.8); cf. Daniel 7.14; Isaiah 9.6-7). In the New Testament the Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled: Jesus Christ, having brilliantly overthrown the kingdoms of the world and their glory, offered to Him by the prince of darkness (Matthew 4.8-10), by the all-powerful right hand of God the Father is seated at His right hand after the resurrection and ascension, far above every dominion and authority and power and lordship (Ephesians 1.21), as the head of every authority and power (Colossians 2.10; cf. Philippians 2.8-10), and, according to the book of Revelation, as the Lord of lords and King of kings he will war against the rulers that are hostile to Him and opposed to the power of God and His Christ (Revelation 17.14; 19.16)."[44]

1.5-6. Unto Him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us a kingdom and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Some MSS read for this verse: "Unto Him that loved us and *set us free* from our sins in His own blood". The Greek word for "to set free" is λυειν, which is very close to the word for "to wash", λουειν.[45]

In the Old Testament, God ordained the Hebrews to be **a peculiar people above all nations,... a royal priesthood and a holy nation** (Exodus 19.5-6), some from among them being specially set aside and anointed for a kingly or priestly service. In the same way, in the New Testament, God has ordained the Church, **the Israel of God** (Galatians 6.16), composed of both Jews and Gentiles, to be **a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people** (I Peter 2.9), some from among us being in a similar manner specially set aside and ordained for a kingly or priestly service. And this is

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[43] St. Athanasius the Great, *Second Discourse against the Arians*, ch. 21.
[44] Zhdanov, in Barsov, M. (ed.), op. cit., pp.52-53.
[45] William Barclay *The Daily Study Bible: The Revelation of John*, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1976, vol. I, pp. 33-34.

accomplished through our life in the Holy One of Israel, the King and Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. For as Christ the King showed Himself Victor over death and over him that has the power of death, the devil (Hebrews 2.14), so we through Him have the power to conquer the death-dealing passions, and **to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy** (Luke 10.19). And as Christ the Great High Priest offered Himself as a Sacrifice on the Cross for the sins of the world, so we through Him offer both our bodies as **a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God** (Romans 12.1) and **the sacrifice of praise to God continually** (Hebrews 13.15).

"Because the King of kings and heavenly Priest united us to His own body by offering Himself for us, there is not one of the saints who has not spiritually the office of priesthood, in that he is a member of the eternal Priest." (The Venerable Bede).

Archimandrites Seraphim and Sergius write: "Independently of this universal priesthood of the people of God, which is received by each Orthodox Christian in the sacrament of holy chrismation, there exist special ministries in the Church that are linked with official gifts received in the sacrament of the priesthood by means of ordination in accordance with apostolic succession...

"And in the Old Testament God calls the Israelite people **a kingdom of priests** (Exodus 19.6), but only in a general, metaphorical sense, for the special priesthood serving the temple in Jerusalem was given by God not to the whole people, but to one of the twelve tribes of Israel - the tribe of Levi (Numbers 3.6-12; cf. Hebrews 7.11). Consequently, the *universal* priesthood of the Israelite people did not at all exclude the necessity of a *special* priesthood, whose ministry was inaccessible even to royal personages, as appears from the incident with King Uzziah, who was punished by God with leprosy for having dared to cense in the temple of the Lord (II Chronicles 26.19).

"In conformity with this, there exists also in the New Testament, besides the universal *royal priesthood* (I Peter 2.9), which consists of the Orthodox Christians as being *the holy people* (in the sense of dedicated to God), a grace-filled, ministerial priesthood selected from its midst, which does not extend to laymen, who have not received the special consecration in accordance with the line of apostolic succession."[46]

Unto the ages of ages. St. John of Damascus writes: "He created the ages Who Himself was before the ages, Whom the divine David thus addresses, **From age to age Thou art** (Psalm 89.2). The divine apostles also says, **Through Whom He created the ages** (Hebrews 1.2).

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[46] Archimandrites Seraphim (Aleksiev) and Sergius (Yazadzhiev), *Why an Orthodox Christian cannot be an Ecumenist*, St. Petersburg, 1992 (in Russian).

"It must then be understood that the word 'age' has various meanings, for it denotes many things. The life of each man is called an age. Again, a period of a thousand years is called an age. Again, the whole course of the present life is called an age. Also, the future life, the immortal life after the resurrection, is spoken of as an age. Again, the word 'age' is used to denote, not time nor yet a part of time as measured by the movement and course of the sun, that is to say, composed of days and nights, but the sort of temporal motion and interval that is co-extensive with eternity. For age is to things eternal what time is to things temporal.

"Seven ages of this world are spoken of, from the creation of the heaven and earth till the general consummation and resurrection of men. For there is a partial consummation, viz., the death of each man; but there is also a general and complete consummation, when the general resurrection of men will come to pass. And the eighth age is the age to come.

"Before the world was formed, when there was as yet no sun dividing day from night, there was not an age such as could be measured, but there was the sort of temporal motion and interval that is co-extensive with eternity. And in this sense there is but one age, and God is spoken of as αιωνιος and προαιωνιος, for the age or aeon itself is His creation. For God, Who alone is without beginning is Himself the Creator of all things, whether age or any other existing thing. And when I say God, it is evident that I mean the Father and His Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and His all-holy Spirit, our one God.

"But we speak also of **ages of ages**, inasmuch as the seven ages of the present world include many ages in the sense of lives of men, and the one age embraces all ages, and the present and the future are spoken of as ages of ages. Further, everlasting life and everlasting punishment prove that the age or aeon to come is unending. For time will not be counted by days and nights even after the resurrection, but there will rather be one day with no evening, wherein the Sun of Righteousness will shine brightly on the righteous, but for the sinful there will be night profound and limitless... Of all the ages, therefore, the sole creator is God, Who hath also created the universe and Who was before the ages."[47]

1.7. Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also who pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him.

"He Who was concealed when at first He came to be judged, will be manifested when He shall come to judge" (The Venerable Bede).

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[47] St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, II, 1. In Eerdmans, *Nicene Fathers*, second series, IX.

"When they see Him as a Judge with power, in the same form in which they pierced Him as the least of all, they will mourn for themselves with a repentance that is too late." (Bede)

Patriarch Anthimus of Jerusalem writes: "The clouds signify the heavenly powers of angels and saints."[48]

"Here is depicted the second glorious Coming of Christ, in complete agreement with the depiction of this Coming in the Gospels (Matthew 24.30, 25.31; Mark 13.26; Luke 21.27; John 19.37). After the greeting (in the first verses of the book), in this verse the holy apostle immediately speaks of the Second Coming of Christ and of the Last Judgement in order to signify the *chief theme* of this book. This is done in order to prepare readers to accept the great and fearful revelations which he has received about this." (Archbishop Averky)

1.7-8. Even so, Amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord, Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come, the Almighty.

St. Gregory the Theologian writes: "This is clearly spoken of the Son".[49]

"By interposing an Amen, He confirms that that which, by the revelation of God, he knows will most certainly to come to pass, will undoubtedly take place" (The Venerable Bede).

I am the First and the Last; besides Me there is no God (Isaiah 44.6; cf. 48.12).

Thou rulest over all things, O Lord, Thou art the Beginning of every beginning (I Chronicles 29.12).

Blessed Jerome writes: "The apostle writing to the Ephesians [1.10] teaches that God has purposed in the fullness of time to sum up and renew in Christ Jesus all things which are in heaven and in earth. Whence also the Saviour Himself in the Revelation of John says, **I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End**."[50]

"He is the beginning Whom no one precedes, the end Whom no one succeeds in His Kingdom" (The Venerable Bede).

"**The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the Almighty** signifies that in Jesus Christ is the beginning, the middle and the end of everything that exists." (St. John of Kronstadt)

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[48] Patriarch Anthimus, *Interpretation of the Sacred Apocalypse*, Jerusalem, 1856 (in Greek).
[49] St. Gregory the Theologian, *Third Theological Oration: On the Son,* 17.
[50] St. Jerome, *Against Jovianus*, Book I, 18. In Eerdmans, *Nicene Fathers*, second series, VI:360.

"To confirm the unchangeableness and inevitability of the Second Coming and the Last Judgement of God, the holy apostle adds, on his own part: **Even so, Amen**, and then testifies to the truth of this by indicating Him Who is **the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end** of everything that exists: the Lord Jesus Christ is the One Who alone is without beginning and without end, the cause of everything that exists; He is eternal; He is the end and the aim towards which everything strives." (Archbishop Averky)

"The Greeks have twenty-four letters, of which the first is 'alpha' and the last is 'omega', signifying that even before the creation of the world and after its end God is without beginning and infinite." (Patriarch Anthimus)

"In verse 4 above the words **Which is, and which was, and which is to come** refer to the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, as explained by St. Andrew; this is clear because the same sentence continues (in verse 5), **and from Jesus Christ**. Here, however, with the addition of the words **the Almighty**, the same words refer to One Person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, and are used by St. Gregory the Theologian in his treatise 'On the Son' as a proof that Jesus Christ is truly God (*Third Theological Oration*, ch. 17; Eerdmans tr., p. 307). St. Athanasius the Great, in his *First Discourse against the Arians*, uses the same quote from the Apocalypse to prove the same thing (ch. 4, Eerdmans translation, p. 312). Concerning this St. Andrew says in his commentary (ch. 1), 'The divinely splendid words are fitting equally for each of the Persons separately and for All together.'"[51]

In these two verses the vast scope and supreme authority of the Apocalypse is indicated. As in the beginning of St. John's Gospel, Jesus Christ is unambiguously proclaimed to be no one less than the Pre-eternal God. So His Revelation is no merely human speculation about the future, but the product of the Divine omniscience which surveys the whole of human history from the viewpoint of eternity.

1.9. I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

"As for the means by which he was given revelations, St. John indicates first of all the place where he was vouchsafed to receive them. This is the island of Patmos, one of the Sporades islands in the Aegean Sea, a desert and precipitous place 40 miles in circumference, located between the island of Icaria and the Cape of Miletus, little inhabited because of the lack of water, the unhealthy climate and the barrenness of the earth. In a cave in a certain mountain, even there is indicated the place where St. John received the

[51] Fr. Seraphim Rose, in Archbishop Averky, *The Apocalypse in the Teachings of Ancient Christianity*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1995, p. 65, note.

revelations. Here there is a small Greek monastery, called 'the Monastery of the Apocalypse'.

"In the same verse mention is also made of the time when St. John received the Apocalypse. This was when St. John was in exile on the island of Patmos, in his own expression, **for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ**, that is, for his fervent apostolic preaching of Jesus Christ. The fiercest persecution against Christians in the first century was under the Emperor Nero. Tradition says that St. John first of all was thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, out of which he emerged unharmed and with renewed strength. The expression **in tribulation**, according to the meaning of the original Greek expression, signifies here the 'suffering' which occurred as a result of persecution and torment - the same thing as 'martyrdom'.

"However, ancient tradition indicates for this [the time of writing of the Apocalypse] the end of the first century. Thus St. Irenaeus writes, 'The Apocalypse appeared not long before this and almost in our time, at the end of the reign of Domitian' (Against Heresies 5.30). The church historian Eusebius states that the pagan writers contemporary to him also mention the exile of the holy Apostle John on the island of Patmos for his testimony of the Divine Word, and they refer this event to the 15th year of the reign of Domitian, 95 or 96 A.D. Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Blessed Jerome affirm the same thing...

"Each of the seven Asia Minor churches which St. John addresses already has its own history and a direction of religious life which in one way or another has already been defined. Christianity in them is already not in its first stage of purity and truth; false Christianity strives to occupy a place in them side by side with true Christianity. All this presupposes that the activity of the holy Apostle Paul, who preached for a long time in Ephesus, was something that had occurred in the distant past. This point of view, founded upon the testimony of St. Irenaeus and Eusebius, refers the time of writing of the Apocalypse to the years 95-96 A.D." (Archbishop Averky)

Another fact in favour of this date is the reference, in chapter 2 verse 13, to the Martyr Antipas, Bishop of Pergamum, who is known to have died in 92 A.D.

1.10. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.

"This condition of seeing with incorporeal eyes and hearing without bodily ears but with one's spiritual nature, is different from dreaming, for it takes place also when one is awake, in the struggle of prayer. This is a condition of spiritual contemplation in which the visible and the invisible supplement each other in one and the same place, at one and the same time." (St. John of Kronstadt)

"In this verse St. John gives the very day on which he was vouchsafed the revelations. This was **the Lord's day** (in Greek, Κυριακη ημερα), which is Sunday. This was the first day of the week, which the Jews called μια Σαββατων, that is, **the first day after the Sabbath**; but the Christians called it 'the Lord's day' in honour of the Resurrected Lord. The very existence of such a name already indicates that the Christians celebrated this day in place of the Old Testament Sabbath." (Archbishop Averky)[52]

St. Jerome writes: "The Lord's day, the day of the Resurrection, the day of Christians, is our day. It is called the Lord's day because on this day the Lord ascended to the Father as Victor; but when the heathens call it the day of the sun, we are most happy to acknowledge their title, for today has risen **the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings** (Malachi 4.2)."[53]

The Lord's day is also known in Church Tradition as the eighth day. It signifies the beginning of eternity, as opposed to the seventh day, which signifies the fullness of time. "The sixth psalm has the superscription: **A Psalm of David at the end of the hymns, concerning the eighth**, which by interpretation means concerning the eighth day, that is, the general day of the resurrection and of the coming terrible judgement of God..." (St. Ambrose)

"Having mentioned the place and time, St. John indicates likewise his own condition, in which he was vouchsafed the apocalyptic visions. **I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day**, he says. In the language of the Prophets, **to be in the Spirit** is to be in the spiritual condition of a man who sees, hears and feels not only with his bodily organs, but with all his inward being. This is not a dream, for such a condition occurs also when one is awake.

"In such an extraordinary condition of his spirit," continues Archbishop Averky, "St. John heard a loud voice as of a trumpet:

"He is first admonished by a voice, that he may direct his attention to the vision" (The Venerable Bede).

1.11. Saying, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last; and what thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyateira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

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[52] William Barclay writes: "The three earliest references to the Lord's Day may well be the following. *The Didache, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, the first manual of Christian worship and instruction, says of the Christian Church: 'On the Lord's Day we meet and break bread' (*Didache* 14.1). Ignatius of Antioch, writing to the Magnesians, describes the Christians as 'no longer living for the Sabbath, but for the Lord's Day' (Ignatius, *To the Magnesians*, 9.1). Melito of Sardis wrote a treatise *Concerning the Lord's Day*. By early in the second century the Sabbath had been abandoned and the Lord's Day was the accepted Christian day." (op. cit., p. 43)

[53] St. Jerome, *Homily 94, on Pascha*.

"He called Himself, not in Hebrew, but in Greek: **the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last**. To the Jews in the Old Testament He revealed Himself under the name 'Jehovah', which signifies 'He that exists from the beginning' or 'He Who Is'; but here He calls Himself by the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, indicating by this that He contains within Himself, like the Father, everything that exists in all the manifestations of being from the beginning to the end. It is characteristic that He declares Himself here as it were under a new name, and it is a Greek name, **the Alpha and the Omega**, as if desiring to show that He is the Messiah for all peoples, who at that time everywhere spoke the Greek language and used the Greek written language.

"The revelation is given to the seven churches comprising the metropolia of Ephesus, which St. John the Theologian then governed, having his permanent dwelling in Ephesus. But of course, in the person of these seven churches the revelation is also given to the whole Church. The number seven, moreover, has a mystical meaning, signifying completeness. Therefore it may be placed here as a symbol of the Ecumenical Church, to which as a whole the Apocalypse is addressed." (Archbishop Averky)

"The Church of Christ was not at that time only in these places, but all fulness is comprised in the number seven. Asia, which is interpreted to mena 'elevation', denotes the proud exaltation of the world in which the Church is sojourning, and, as is the method of the divine mystery, the genus is contained in the species. For the Apostle Paul also writes to seven churches, but not to the same as St. John. And although these seven churches are a sevenfold figure of the whole Church, still the things which he blames, or praises, came to pass in them one by one" (The Venerable Bede).

Pilgrims to the Cave of the Apocalypse on Patmos are shown a three-pronged crevice in the ceiling of the cave which is said to have been created when the Lord spoke to St. John.

1.12-16. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And, being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire. And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace. And His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars. And out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. And His countenance was as the sun shining in his strength.

The *seven* candlesticks here, which represent the grace-bearing capacity of the New Testament Church, should be compared with the *single* candlestick in Zechariah 4, which refers to that of the Old Testament Church. As David Baron explains: "Often did God in effect threaten Israel through the prophets to remove His candlestick; but in His long-suffering for a long time, even after

the sceptre, *the emblem of governmental power*, had been removed, the candlestick - *which is the emblem of Israel's religious or ecclesiastical position as witness for God*… - was not taken away till the cup of his national iniquity was filled up in the rejection of Him Who is the **Light of light**, for the diffusion of which this very candlestick was formed, and in their final resistance of the Holy Spirit. Then the Kingdom of God was taken away from them and **given to a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof**.

"On the disappearance of the candlestick from Israel, the *seven* golden candlesticks come into view as representing the new people of God, the Church of this dispensation planted on the earth, that during the period of Israel's blindness and darkness it might fulfil Israel's mission of shining before the Lord in His sanctuary, and letting its light stream out into the night of the world's darkness: the seven as representing the Church, instead of the one as representing Israel is not without significance.

"The seven Christian εκκλησιαι selected by the Lord out of the many Christian assemblies which already then existed even in that one pro-consular province of Asia, to be symbolised by the seven golden λυχνιαι (lampstands), *are meant to represent the one Church of Christ through all time, and in all places.*"[54]

This description is reminiscent of **the Ancient of Days** (Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14; cf. 10.5-6). The following elements may be discerned in it according to Archbishop Averky's interpretation: (i) the Great High Priest clothed in the ephod, a garment of the Jewish chief priests (Exodus 28.31); (ii) the King girded about the breast with a golden belt; (iii) the Pre-eternal God of one essence with the Father, Whose white hair signifies His eternity (Daniel 7.13; cf. Matthew 17.2); (iv) the fearful Judge of the living and the dead, Whose eyes see all and Whose word is all-penetrating (cf. Hebrews 4.12); (v) the Lord of the Church, in Whose hand are all Her shepherds ("these seven stars signify the seven representatives of the churches, or bishops, called here **the angels of the churches**"). Once again, the emphasis is on the Divine nature of Christ, which is characteristic of all of St. John's writings.

"That which was a foreshadowing in the vision of the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah ch. 6) was contemplated by John in its fullness, for instead of the Seraphim the Son of Man was surrounded by seven candlesticks, that is, by the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and in His right hand were seven stars, that is, the leaders of the Universal Church, through whom He steered the helm of the great church ark. His being clothed in a podir has the same significance as the long garment filling the temple to the edges in the vision of the holy Prophet Isaiah, that is, the fullness of grace given by the Church. His being girded round the breast with a golden belt signifies the grace of the two Testaments: the Old and the New, by which the righteous wrath of God is as it were bound by the promises of clemency for sinners." (St. John of Kronstadt)

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[54] Baron, *Commentary on Zechariah*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1918, 1988, p. 132.

"The Orthodox Church service for the Meeting of the Lord (Feb. 2) identifies the **Ancient of Days** with God the Son ('The Ancient of Days appears this day as a babe'). Thus, in this interpretation, when Daniel beheld the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man together, it was a vision of the Divine and human natures of Christ. Some Fathers, however, understand the Ancient of Days to be God the Father; in this case, the vision if of Two Persons of the Holy Trinity, and as St. John Chrysostom says in his commentary on Daniel, this prophet 'was the first and only one (in the Old Testament) to see the Father and the Son, as if in a vision.' For the devout student of Scripture, of course, there is no 'contradiction' between these two interpretations; in such mystical visions we do not see a 'literal picture' of the Godhead (such as to believe that God really is an 'old man', but only a hint of Divine mysteries.) Thus, in his commentary on the same passage of Daniel, St. John Chrysostom adds: 'Do not seek clarity in prophecies, where there are shadows and riddles, just as in lightning you do not seek a constant light, but are satisfied that it only flashes momentarily.'"[55]

"By **paps** he here means the two Testaments, with which He feeds the body of the saints in communion with Himself. For the golden girdle is the choir of the saints, which cleaves to the Lord in harmonious love, and embraces the Testaments, **keeping**, as the Apostle says, **the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace** (Ephesians 4.3). The antiquity and eternity of majesty are represented by whiteness on the head… The eyes of the Lord are the preachers, who, with spiritual fire, bring light to the faithful and to the unbelieving a consuming flame. By the **fiery feet** he means the Church of the last times, which is to be searched and proved by severe afflictions. In the **right hand** of Christ is the spiritual Church. **On Thy right hand**, he says, **stood the queen in a vesture of gold** (Psalm 44.10). And as it stands on His right hand, He saith, **Come, ye blessed of My Father, receive the Kingdom** (Matthew 25.34)." (The Venerable Bede)

"The **seven stars** can be accepted as all the higher intercessors of the Church taken together, who are led to the knowledge of the Truth directly by the Spirit of God or through the mediation of Angel Guardians, who are entrusted with caring for the good of the churches. Similarly, earthly kingdoms have their own invisible intercessors at the Throne of God, who think about the good of kingdoms and peoples. They intercede before God for the spiritual enlightenment especially of those in whom receptivity to the understanding of the Truth about God and eternal salvation has not yet been wiped out. We see an example of such cares of the Angels to whom as it were the guarding even of whole kingdoms have been entrusted by God in the holy Prophet Daniel. He was counted worthy of the revelation that the Angel Guardian of the Jewish people, the holy Leader of the Heavenly Hosts Michael, together with the Archangel Gabriel, was interceding at the Throne of God for the return of the Jews from their Persian captivity. But the Angel

[55] Rose, op. cit., p. 69, note.

Guardian of the Persian kingdom was interceding that the Jews should perhaps be left longer in captivity, finding, of course, that the remaining of believers in the True God in the midst of the fire-worshippers was useful for the peoples of that spacious, almost universal kingdom, which consisted of 127 provinces, in accordance with the number of its peoples.

"It is also noteworthy that an intercessor for the return of the Jewish people from captivity was also the very ruler of the Persian kingdom, who ruled the country under Darius and Cyrus. This ruler was the holy Prophet Daniel, for his supreme wisdom gave him a place at the very Throne of the Persian kings. However, earthly glory did not dim in Daniel his love for the Glory of God, which is why he was justly called the Angel of his people, or better, the Angel of the Old Testament Israel that was contemporary to him and scattered over the whole of the world of that time." (St. John of Kronstadt)

1.17. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.

"**The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak** (Matthew 26.41). It is dust, and for that reason strong tension of the spirit weakens the links of the flesh which are called nerves, and loss of consciousness may result, as in a faint or when one is dying. The Prophet Daniel mentions this exhaustion when he was counted worthy of may mystic visions about the coming events of world history which had to do with the God's kingdom of glory on earth." (St. John of Kronstadt)

"From this one may conclude that the beloved disciple, who had once lain on the breast of Jesus, did not recognize in the One Who had appeared a single familiar feature. And this is not surprising; for if the disciples did not easily recognize their Lord after His Resurrection in His glorified body on earth, all the more difficult would it be to recognize Him in this resplendent heavenly glory." (Archbishop Averky)

Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more (II Corinthians 5.16).

1.17-18. And He laid His right and upon Me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the First and the Last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive unto the ages of ages, Amen; and I have the keys of hades and death.

"It is as if He said: Fear not, John, for I am Life and the source of Life according to My Divinity, but I have taken on death according to My Humanity, so as to give eternal life to those who believe in Me, but I have risen by My Divine power, and I am alive, as you see, and My Life will not be cut off by death, like those who were resurrected from the dead and again died, but I am alive to the ages of ages. And I have the power to take out of hell and deliver from death, in accordance with the prophet: **The Lord killeth and giveth life, He bringeth down into hades and raiseth up again** (I Kings 2.6)." (Patriarch Anthimus)

"By this word and touch Christ strengthened John and made him capable, in spite of his carnal weakness, of entering the spiritual world and receiving the Revelations, of which the first was that Christ gives nobody the power to distribute death, but retains the keys of death and hell for Himself. In this is revealed His special love for man, for the Judge of the earth gives the right of granting clemency (i.e. the keys of the Heavenly Kingdom) to His servants, the Apostles, but prudently retains the keys to the eternal torments for Himself. He, as the uniquely kind and perfectly merciful Lord and Lover of mankind, is ready to spare those who turn to Him at the very last moment, when none of His authorised servants is there to provide clemency." (St. John of Kronstadt)

"From these words St. John was to understand that the One Who appeared was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and that His appearance could not be fatal for the apostle, but on the contrary would be lifegiving. To have the keys to something signified among the Jews to receive authority over something. Thus **the keys of hades and death** signify authority over the death of the body and the soul." (Archbishop Averky)

"He is **the first**, because **by Him were all things made** (Colossians 1.16; **the last**, because in Him are all things restored (Ephesians 1.10). Not only, He says, have I conquered death by resurrection, but I have dominion also over death itself. And this He also bestowed upon the Church by breathing upon it the Holy Spirit, saying, **Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them**, and the rest (John 20.23)." (The Venerable Bede).

1.19. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.

Thus, like all true prophecy, the Apocalypse is a revelation of the true meaning of events, both present and future.

1.20. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

"**Stars**. That is, the rulers of the Church. For the priest, as Malachi says, **is the angel of the Lord of hosts** (Malachi 2.7)." (Venerable Bede)

"The seven stars are the Angels, the guards and defenders of the churches." (Patriarch Anthimus)

Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava writes: "With regard to ecclesiastical life, in the speeches of the Saviour we are directed to the fact, as to one of the most striking phenomena of the last times, that at that time ***stars*** **will fall**

from heaven (Matthew 24.29). According to the explanation of the Saviour Himself, **the stars are the Angels of the Churches,** that is, *bishops*."[56]

Archbishop Theophanes and other interpreters saw the falling of the stars, i.e. the bishops, as referring especially to the twentieth century. Thus Blessed Pelagia of Ryazan said: "Many dioceses have already been deprived of their episcopate before God because the bishops have not hindered and have not rebuked the enemies of the Cross. Many stars have fallen from heaven, as was foretold in the Apocalypse."[57]

"Remember the star which led the wise men to worship the Sun of Righteousness, and the Angel which showed the shepherds not only the way to Him, but also the signs by which they would easily find the truth amidst the darkness of the cave (which signifies the darkness of this world).

"And so the **seven stars** can be accepted as the sum-total of the highest leaders of the Church, who are led to the knowledge of the truth directly by the Holy Spirit or through the mediation of Angel Guardians who are entrusted with care for the good of the churches. Similarly, earthly kingdoms have their invisible leaders before the throne of God, who is providentially concerned for the good of kingdoms and peoples. They petition God for the spiritual enlightenment especially of those in whom receptivity for the understanding concerning God and eternal salvation has not yet been erased. We see an example of such cares of the Angels to whom God has entrusted even whole kingdoms as it were in guardianship, in the holy Prophet Daniel. He was counted worthy of a revelation that the Guardian Angel of the Hebrew people was the holy Archangel Michael, who together with the Archangel Gabriel petitioned at the throne of God for the return of the Jews from their Persian captivity. But the Angel Guardian of the Persian kingdom petitioned that the Jews should be left for longer in captivity, considering, of course, that the stay of believers in the true God in the midst of the fire-worshippers was useful for the peoples of this vast, almost universal kingdom, which consisted of 127 regions according to the number of distinct peoples.

"Also worthy of note is the fact that the petitioner for the return from captivity of the Jewish people was also the very ruler of the Persian kingdom, who had ruled the country under Darius and Cyrus. This ruler was the holy Prophet Daniel, for his superior wisdom had won for him a place at the very throne of the Persian kings. However, earthly glory did not dim in Daniel his love for the glory of God, which is why it is just to call him the Angel of his people, or, better, the Angel of the Old Testament Church that was contemporary with him, being scattered across the whole of the world at that time." (St. John of Kronstadt)

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[56] *The Letters of Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1976, p. 29 (in Russian).

[57] http://pravoslavie.by.ru/library/pelageia.htm ®.

"The seven churches are named instead of the One Universal Church and instead of all Christians, for the revelation of God is meant for all of them (1.1). The bishops of each church are something more than simple lampstands, being her representatives and the bearers of her ideals. It is precisely of them that it is said that **the stars are the angels of the churches**. The ancient interpreters (Andrew of Caesarea, Arethas, Oecumenius) understood by these angels the bodiless spirits - the angel guardians; the more recent interpreters want to see in them symbolic angels. But it is best to remain with the present interpretation, according to which by the angels are understood the bishops, as leaders of the churches (Justin the Philosopher, Blessed Augustine). Thus, according to the image of the Apocalypse, the Christian archpastors are always in the hand of God, and God is for them a constant protector, guide and judge."[58]

"Nevertheless," writes A. Zhdanov, "it is possible and necessary to see here at the same time a reference to the invisible protectors of the churches who were originally, and in the strict sense, called the angels of the seven churches by the Lord, and who are types of the bishops. This is how this passage was understood by the great teachers of the Church Gregory the Theologian and St. Epiphanius. The first says: 'I believe that a special angel protects each church: for this is what John teaches me in the Revelation.' Why, in parting from the Constantinopolitan Church, did he cry: "Forgive, On angels, the overseer of this church and also my period her and departure from here.' The latter, basing himself on the same words of the Apocalypse, calls the angels the guardians of the churches and the guardians of the altars. No less clear and definite are the words of St. Ambrose, who says that for the defence of every flock of God the Lord places not only bishop, but also angels. St. Basil the Great, in consoling the presbyters of Nicopolis, who were being cast by the Arians out of the church, writes to them: 'You are saddened by the fact that you have been expelled from the defence of the walls, but you dwell under the defence of the God of heaven, and with you remains the angel that is the guardian of the church (of Nicopolis)'."[59]

The bishops are held in the hand of Christ, for He is the Bishop of bishops, **the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls**, in St. Peter's words (I Peter 2.25). Thus on his way to martyrdom in Rome, St. Ignatius the Godbearer, wrote: "Remember in your prayers the church in Syria, which now, instead of me, has God as her Pastor. Jesus Christ, with your love, will be her only Bishop."[60]

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[58] Lopukhin, *The Bible Interpreted*, St Petersburg, 1911-1913 / Stockholm, 1987 (in Russian).
[59] Zhdanov, op. cit., pp. 64-65.
[60] St. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans*, 9.

1. The Church of Ephesus

2.1-7. Unto the angel of the Church of Ephesus write: These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, Who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear those who are evil; and thou hast tried those who say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, unless thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

St. Gregory the Theologian writes: "Every Church has its guardian."[61] The guardian, or angel of the Church of Ephesus addressed here is probably the Apostle Timothy, who died in the year 93 A.D.

"In the second, as in the third chapter, are set forth the revelations received by St. John concerning each of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor, as well as corresponding instructions to them. These revelations contain praises of their Christian life and faith, a reproof of their insufficiencies, exhortations and consolations, threats and promises. The content of these revelations and instructions has the closest relationship to the condition of church life in the churches of Asia Minor at the end of the first century. But at the same time it also refers to the whole Church in general for the whole course of Her existence on earth. Some even see here an indication of seven periods in the life of the whole Christian Church from the time of the apostles to the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ.

"Thus there exists the opinion that the seven Churches represent seven periods in the life of the whole Christian Church from her foundations to the end of the world: 1) the Church of Ephesus represents the first period in the history of the Ecumenical Church - the Apostolic Church, which laboured and did not faint while fighting against the first heretics, the Nicolaitans, but soon abandoned the good custom of doing good to others - the 'communion of goods' (**thy first love**); 2) the Church of Smyrna represents the second period - the period of persecutions against the Church, of which there were ten; 3) the Church of Pergamos represents the third period - the epoch of the Ecumenical Councils and the struggle with the heresies with the sword of the word of God; 4) the Church of Thyateira - the fourth period, or the period of the flourishing of Christianity amidst the new peoples of Europe; 5) the Church of Sardis - the epoch of humanism and materialism of the 16th to 18th centuries;

[61] St. Gregory the Theologian, *The Last Farewell,* 9.

6) the Church of Philadelphia - the last but one period of the life of the Church of Christ - the epoch contemporary to our own, when the Church truly **has little strength** in contemporary humanity and persecutions begin again, when patience is necessary; 7) the Church of Laodicea - the last, most terrible epoch before the end of the world, characterized by indifference to the faith and external prosperity." (Archbishop Averky).

However, writes Lev Tikhomirov, "if we can consider Christian history as divided into seven epochs, not for any of these parts can we establish precise boundaries which would separate it from the preceding or succeeding epoch. It could not be otherwise. Each epoch expresses a certain spirit or type that is predominant at the given time. It does not arise immediately, does not change immediately and is not in all places at the same time. While the spirit of an earlier epoch may continue in one country, in others the beginnings of something else are already appearing."[62]

It follows that the prophecy concerning the Ephesian Church may be interpreted to refer *both* to church life at the end of the first century *and* to the first epoch in the history of the *whole* Church *throughout history* until the Second Coming of Christ. The one interpretation is not incompatible with the other; for Holy Scripture often has more than one correct interpretation or aspect of its meaning. For, as Archbishop Averky writes, "in the prophetic vision of events, near and far are sometimes represented as if in one perspective, merged together, especially if the one, nearer event serves as a figure of the other, further one."[63]

"One cannot help presupposing that the named Asiatic churches had the typical particularities of those ecclesiastical conditions which the Church would experience while the Saviour would be walking in the midst of her manifestations, that is, until the end of the ages. Therefore the instructions and descriptions given by Him on the one hand corresponded to what had to be said to them, and on the other hand correspond to what must be revealed and said to the Universal Church in the future, in her various manifestations and conditions. But if it is so, then there were precisely seven future manifestations that the Church was destined to experience, in seven ages." (Tikhomirov).

And so, according to this interpretation, "the Church of Ephesus represents the first period in the history of the Ecumenical Church: the Apostolic Church which laboured and did not faint while fighting against the first heretics, the Nicolaitans, but soon abandoned the good custom of doing good to others - the 'communion of goods' (**thy first love**)...

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[62] Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 557.

[63] Averky, *Handbook to the Study of the Sacred Scriptures of the New Testament*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1974, vol. I, p. 256 (in Russian).

"The Church of Ephesus is praised for her first works - her labours, patience and resistance to false teachers. But at the same time she is condemned for abandoning her first love and hears the terrible threat that her lampstand will be removed from its place if she does not repent. However, what is good about the Ephesians is their hatred of **the works of the Nicolaitans**. The Lord promises to count the victors over temptations and passions worthy of tasting of the fruits of the tree of life. Ephesus was a very ancient trading city on the shore of the Aegean sea which was famed for its wealth and huge population. The holy Apostle Paul preached there for more than two years, and finally consecrated his beloved disciple Timothy as Bishop of Ephesus. The holy Apostle John lived a long time there and died there. Later the Third Ecumenical Council took place in Ephesus; it confessed that the Most Holy Virgin Mary is the Birth-Giver of God [Theotokos]. The threat of the removal of her lampstand from the Ephesian Church was realised. From being a great world centre Ephesus was soon turned into nothing; from the previous majestic city there remained only a pile of ruins and a small Muslim village. The great lampstand of primitive Christianity went out completely. The Nicolaitans who are mentioned here were heretics who represented a branch of the Gnostics and were distinguished by their debauchery. They were reproached also by the holy Apostles Peter and Jude in their epistles (II Peter 2.1 and Jude 4). The beginning of this heresy was laid by the Antiochian proselyte Nicholas, one of the seven first deacons of Jerusalem (Acts 6.5), who fell away from the faith. The reward of the victors from amongst the Ephesian Christians was the partaking of the paradisal tree of life. By this we are to understand the good things of the future blessed life of the righteous in general, whose foreshadowing was the tree of life in the original paradise, where our forefathers lived." (Archbishop Averky)

St. Hippolytus writes: "He, as one of the seven (that were chosen) for the diaconate, was appointed by the apostles. But Nicholas departed from correct doctrine, and was in the habit of inculcating indifference of both life and food. And when the disciples (of Nicholas) continued to offer insult to the Holy Spirit, John reproved them in the Apocalypse as fornicators and eaters of things offered unto idols."[64]

The Venerable Bede writes: "**The Nicolaitans** are named from Nicolas the deacon, of whom Clement writes that, when he was reproved for his jealousy of a most beautiful wife, he answered that whoever wanted might take her to wife, and says that, on account of this, unbelievers taught that the Apostles allowed to all a promiscuous and common intercourse with women. And the Nicolaitans are reported to have put forth some fabulous and almost heathen statements concerning the beginning of the world, and not to have kept their food separate from things offered to idols."

The intolerance of evil which characterises True Christianity, and which was displayed above all by the holy apostles (Acts 5.1-11; I Corinthians 5.1-5;

[64] St. Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies*, Book VII, 24. In *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, V:115.

Galatians 1.6-9; II John 10; Jude 3-21), helped preserve the red-hot ardour of the Christians through most of the first century. However, towards the end of the early apostolic period a cooling of ardour was discernible, allowing the infiltration of false teachings and heresies. Thus St. Paul said to the Ephesian presbyters: **Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them** (Acts 20.28-30).

In general, the Ephesian Church overcame this temptation, and not long after St. John's repose, the bishop of Antioch, St. Ignatius, commended the Ephesians for their refusal to allow false teachers to sow evil doctrine among them.[65] However, that most characteristic sign of the early Church, the having all things in common, did not survive the apostolic period. It was not until the appearance of coenobitic monasticism in the fourth century that this form of Christian love again received an institutional expression.

"The removal of the candlestick of the Church is the deprivation of Divine Grace, to which she will be subjected in agitation and shaking from the spirits of malice and the evil men who help them." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

Tikhomirov writes: "This threat was realised in the next, Smyrnaean period, when the believers had to disperse from the persecutions... All in all, the Ephesian age, the time of the apostolic preaching, was the age when the forces of both warring sides, that of the Kingdom of God and that which was against it, were organised. The Church appeared and began to give birth to children that were courageous in spirit (that is the explanation of the expression **a man child** [in 12.5]), who was to **shepherd all nations with a rod of iron** [12.5]. To the help of the preachers of the truth there appeared the power of Christ Himself. But the devil, having suffered a defeat, does not humble himself, but enters into the battle with the Church, stirring up persecutions and thinking up **the mystery of iniquity** [II Thessalonians 2.7], which in the end had to raise against God the idea of the man-god and transfer the worship of people to the devil himself."[66]

"**He that hath an ear, let him hear**: Every man has a physical ear, but only the spiritual man acquires a spiritual ear… To such a man, who has overcome the temptations of the demons, He promises to give to taste of the tree of life, that is, to make him a participant in the good things of the future age." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

St. John of Damascus writes: "God planted the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. The tree of knowledge was for trial, and proof, and exercise of

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[65] St. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 9.
[66] Tikhomirov, op. cit., pp. 559, 562.

man's obedience and disobedience. It was named thus or else it was because to those who partook of it was given power to know their own nature. Now this is a good thing for those who are mature, but an evil thing for the immature and those whose appetites are too strong… The tree of life, on the other hand, was a tree having the energy that is the cause of life, or to be eaten only by those who deserve to live and are not subject to death… The tree of life may be understood as that more divine thought that has its origin in the world of sense, and the ascent through that to the originating and constructive cause of all. And this was the name He gave to every tree, implying fullness and indivisibility, and conveying only participation in what is good. But by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we are to understand that sensible and pleasurable food which, sweet though it seems, in reality brings him who partakes of it into communion with evil."[67]

[67] St. Damascene, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, II, 11. In Eerdmans, *Nicene Fathers*, second series, IX: 29,30.

2. The Church of Smyrna

2.8-11. And unto the angel of the Church in Smyrna write: These things saith the First and the Last, Who was dead and is alive: I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation for ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; he that overcometh shall not be hurt by the second death.

The angel of the Church of Smyrna addressed here may be St. Bucolus or, less likely, his successor, St. Polycarp, who was martyred in 155. "The Church of Smyrna," according to Archbishop Averky, "signifies the second period, the period of persecutions against the Church". And the **tribulation for ten days** refers, according to Tikhomirov, the persecutions of: 1) Nero (in 64), 2) Domitian (91), 3) Trajan (98), 4) Marcus Aurelius (177), 5) Septimius Severus (202), 6) Decius (250) and Gallus (252), 7) Valerian (257), 8) Aurelianus (275), 9) Diocletian (303) and 10) Maximian (311).[68]

"Smyrna was also one of the oldest cities of Asia Minor, being considered enlightened and glorious in pagan antiquity. Smyrna was no less remarkable in the history of the first age of Christianity, as being a city that was enlightened very early by the light of Christianity and as having preserved **the deposit of the faith** amidst persecutions. The Church of Smyrna, according to tradition, was founded by the holy Apostle John the Theologian, and the latter's disciple, St. Polycarp, who was bishop in the city, glorified it by his martyric exploit. According to information provided by the ecclesiastical historian Eusebius, almost immediately after the apocalyptic prediction, there arose a fierce persecution against the Christians in Asia Minor, during which St. Polycarp of Smyrna suffered. According to some interpreters, **ten days** signifies the shortness of the period of persecutions; according to others, it is the reverse - a certain considerable period, for the Lord commands the Smyrnaeans to lay up **faithfulness unto death**, i.e. for some considerable period. Some understand by this the persecution that took place under Domitian and lasted for ten years. Others see in it a forecast of all ten of the persecutions which the Christians suffered from the pagan emperors during the course of the first three centuries." (Archbishop Averky)

"Christ is **the First** as God, and **the Last** as having become man in the latter times and opened to us eternal life by His death of three days." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

The blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan signifies Talmudic Judaism. For by contrast with the

[68] Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 562.

Church of Christ, **the Israel of God**, the apostate Jews constitute **the synagogue of Satan**. **For he is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God** (Romans 2.28-29).

The synagogue of Satan denotes the Jews, whose slanders against the Christians were the first cause of the persecutions against them, as we read in The Acts of the Apostles. Moreover, these slanders continued in succeeding generations until the present day. St. Justin the Martyr refuted these slanders in his *Dialogue* with the Jewish Rabbi Tryphon; but they are repeated to this day in the Babylonian Talmud.

The Jewish persecutions of the Church were hardly less fierce than the pagan persecutions. Thus when the Jews in Palestine rose in revolt against the Roman authorities under Bar Kochba (died 135), they also attacked the Christians who refused to join them. Again, in 150, the secret Jewish government-in-exile in Babylon stirred up a major revolt in Libya, Egypt and Cyprus, in which they killed 350,000 Greeks.[69]

Jewish hatred of Christians and the Roman empire was expressed in their daily prayer life. Thus Sergius and Tamara Fomin write: "To the prayer 'birkam za-minim' which was read everyday against heretics and apostates there was added the 'curse' against 'the proud state' (of Rome) and against all the enemies of Israel, in particular the Christians… [The Christians were also identified with] the scapegoat, on which the sins of the Jews were laid and which was then driven into the wilderness as a gift to the devil. According to rabbinic teaching, the goat signified Esau and his descendants, who at the present time were the Christians".[70]

Another name that the Jews had for the Christians was Edom, and the Roman Empire was called "the kingdom of the Edomites". Rabbi David Kimchi writes as follows in *Obadiam*: "What the Prophets foretold about the destruction of Edom in the last days was intended for Rome, as Isaiah explains (34.1)… For when Rome is destroyed, Israel shall be redeemed." And Rabbi Abraham in his book *Tseror Hammor* writes: "Immediately after Rome is destroyed, we shall be redeemed."[71]

The teaching of the Talmud incited the Jews to terrible crimes against Gentiles, especially Christians. "Under Theodosius II," writes L.A. Tikhomirov, "it was discovered that the Jews, on the day of the feast of the execution of Haman [Purim], had introduced the practice of burning the

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[69] Ioannis E. Antonopoulos, *Conspiracy and Love*, Athens, 1979 (in Greek). See also Tikhomirov, op. cit., section 7.

[70] Fomin and Fomina, *Russia before the Second Coming,* vol. 1, Sergiev Posad, 1994, pp. 201-202 (in Russian).

[71] Quoted in Rev. I.B. Pranaitis, *The Talmud Unmasked*, St. Petersburg, 1892, Bloomfield Books, Sudbury, Suffolk, pp. 43, 80, 81.

Cross. The government had to undertake repressions against the blasphemy, but the Jews were not pacified. Under the same Theodosius II, in the city of Imma, the Jews during one of their feasts took hold of a Christian child, crucified him on a cross and with scourges cut him into pieces. The disturbed Christians took to arms, and a bloody battle took place. This incident, as they said, was not unique. The Christian historian Socrates relates that the Jews more than once crucified Christian children. At that time it was not a matter of 'ritual killings', and in such acts only the hatred of the Jews for Christians and mockery of them was seen. In the given case Theodosius II executed those guilty of the murder, but at the same time the government began to take measures to weaken Jewry. Theodosius destroyed the Jewish patriarchate in Palestine and confiscated the sums collected throughout Jewry for the patriarchate. But all these repressions did not quickly pacify the Jews. Under the same Theodosius II there took place in 415 the well-known brawl in Alexandria elicited by the killing of Christians by the Jews. All this boldness of the Jews in the face of a power that was evidently incomparably greater than theirs seems improbable. But we must bear in mind that this was an age of terrible Messianic fanaticism on the part of the Jews. It often drove them to acts that were senseless, in which pure psychosis was operating. Here, for example, is a purely internal incident having no relation to the Christians. At about the same time, in 432, on the island of Cyprus there took place an event which shows to what an inflamed condition the Jews of that time could come. On the island there appeared a man who was evidently mad, called Moses, the same who had led the people out of Egypt through the Red Sea. He declared that he now had an order from the Lord to lead the Jews out of Cyprus into Palestine through the Mediterranean Sea. His preached attracted crowds of Jews who did not hesitate to follow the prophet. These hordes went to the sea and, at a sign from Moses, began to hurl themselves from a lofty cliff into the water. Many crashed against the rocks, others drowned, and only the forcible intervention of the Christians saved the rest: fishermen dragged them from the water, while other inhabitants forcibly drove the Jews from the shore. This mass psychosis shows to what lengths the Jews could go in the name of the idea of the re-establishment of the Kingdom of Israel…

"The [Western] Church had already quite early, in the sixth century, begun to take measures to protect Christians from the influence of the Jews. Councils in Orleans in 538 and 545 decreed the suppression of relations between Christians and Jews and, moreover, forbade the Jews from publicly showing themselves during the Christian Pascha, doubtless to cut off the possibility of any blasphemous outrages. But we can understand why these measures could not be maintained, nor were they systematic, and relations inevitably continued, having two kinds of consequences: some they spiritually cut off from Christianity and drew them into heresy, and others they filled with hatred for the Jews."[72]

[72] Tikhomirov, op. cit., pp. 340-341, 350.

In about 520, 4000 Christians were martyred by the Jewish ruler of the South Arabian land of Omir (or Himyar), Dû-Nuwâs, for their refusal to renounce Christ.[73] Again, in 555, the Jews took part in the Samaritan rebellion against Byzantium on the Samaritan side in spite of their traditional disdain for the Samaritans.

During the Time of Troubles that began for Byzantium with the murder of the Emperor Maurice in 602, the Jewish anti-Roman consciousness reached a new peak of frenzy. David Keys writes: "The so-called *Book of Zerubabel*, written by a rabbi of that name in Persian-ruled Babylon in the first quarter of the seventh century AD, prophesied the coming of the Jewish Messiah (and his mother!) and the defeat of the Christian Roman monster – an emperor/pope called Armilus – the son of Satan. Furthermore, a Palestinian Jew called Jacob who had been forcibly baptised by the Romans in Carthage described the Empire in typically apocalyptic terms as 'the fourth beast' which was being 'torn in pieces by the nations, [so] that the ten horns may prevail and Hermolaus Satan… the Little Horn may come.'

"The Jews viewed the apparently imminent collapse of the Roman Empire in the first quarter of the seventh century as evidence that the 'beast' (the formerly pagan but now Christian empire) was doomed, that the Devil in the guise of the last Roman emperor or Christian pope would be killed by the (imminently expected) Messiah. They saw the Persians (and a few years later, the Arabs) as the agents who would help destroy the 'Roman beast'. Violent and often Messianic Jewish revolutionary attitudes had been increasing throughout the second half of the sixth century and went into overdrive as the Empire began to totter in the first quarter of the seventh. In Antioch in AD 608, Christian attempts [by the mad tyrant Phocas] at forced conversion, as the Persians threatened the city, triggered a major revolt in the Jewish quarter. At first the Jewish rebels were successful, and their community's arch-enemy, the city's powerful Christian patriarch, [St.] Anastasius, was captured, killed and mutilated. But the revolt was soon put down – and the 800-year-old Antiochian Jewish community was almost totally extinguished."[74]

The situation was no better in the Holy Land. The Jewish sent an appeal to all the Jews of Palestine, inviting them to come and join the Persians. Enraged crowds destroyed the churches of Tiberias, killed the local bishop and 90,000 Christians in one day. When the Persians conquered Jerusalem, most of the Christians were sent into captivity to Persia. However, "the Jews distinguished themselves at this point with a beastly cruelty unique in the history of the world. They spared no money to buy many Christians from the Persians with one purpose only – to gain enjoyment in killing them. They say that in this way they bought and destroyed 80,000 people. The Jewish

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[73] See the life of the Holy Martyr Al-Harith, in St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, House Springs, MO; Chrysostom Press, 1995, vol. II, pp. 351-376; Mango, op. cit., p. 92; Tikhomirov, op. cit., chapters 41 and 42.

[74] Keys, *Catastrophe*, London: Arrow books, 2000, pp. 91-92.

historian G. Graetz glides silently over this terrible fact, saying only: 'Filled with rage, the Jews of course did not spare the Christians' and 'did not spare the holy things of the Christians'. Graetz reduces the number of Christians killed to 19,000."[75]

The Persians were defeated by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, who banished the Jews of Jerusalem to a distance of three miles from the city, and decreed that all the Jews of the empire should be baptized.

But the pendulum swung again when the Byzantines were defeated by the new power of the Arab Muslims. The Jews were delighted. Many of them thought that Mohammed was a prophet who had come to prepare the way for the Messiah…

The persecution of the Christians by the Jews has continued right up to the present day, as was most clearly demonstrated in the Russian revolution, when nine-tenths of the leading commissars at the beginning of the revolution were Jewish…

"From the promises given to the Churches of Ephesus and Smyrna it is clear that only those who conquer temptations will inherit the eternal good things. There can be no doubt that this relates both to external and internal temptations, for both the former and the latter come, with the permission of God, from the world, the flesh and the devil, to test faith and hope in God. As a rule, they are permitted for a short time, as long as one can bear them. For one person is given greater strength to combat temptation, and another less; but everyone must be a victor. The good things of the future age are not attained easily, since from everyone is demanded victory in temptations. But temptations will become stronger at the end of the world until even the elect will be in great danger of losing the ability to conquer the subtle craftiness of the evil one. In the last times Satan skilfully began to cast out of the saving ark of the Church all those who were not able to resist the false teaching of his hellish servants, the false prophets of this world." (St. John of Kronstadt)

St. Hippolytus writes: "The **second death** is the lake of fire that burns."[76]

St. Aphrahat writes: "It is right for us to be afraid of **the second death**, that which is full of weeping and gnashing of teeth, and of groanings and miseries, that which is situated in outer darkness."[77]

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[75] Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 343. However, Graetz admits that the Jews took a greater part in the destruction of Christian churches and monasteries than the Persians themselves (*A History of the Jews*, Odessa, 1908, vol. 1, pp. 28-32 (in Russian)).

[76] St. Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 65. In Eerdmans, *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, V: 218.

[77] St. Aphrahat, *Select Demonstrations*, VII, 19. In Eerdmans, *Nicene Fathers*, second series, XIII:381.

"The **second death** is… the cutting off from God of a sinful soul which lives in carnal desires, of which the Lord says: **Let the dead bury the dead** (Matthew 8.22)." (Patriarch Anthimus)

"By **the second death** which is to come for unbelievers after the death of the body is to be understood their condemnation to eternal torments (cf. 21.8; Matthew 10.28). To him that overcomes, that is, to him that endures all persecutions, is promised **a crown of life**, or the inheritance of eternal good things." (Archbishop Averky)

3. The Church of Pergamum

2.12-16. And to the angel of the Church in Pergamum write: These things saith He Who hath the sharp sword with two edges: I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast My name, and hast not denied My faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sanctified unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

"The Church of Pergamum signifies the third period, the epoch of the Ecumenical Councils and the battle with heresies by the sword of the word of God...

"The Church of Pergamum is praised by the Lord for keeping His name and not rejecting faith in Him, although it was situated amidst the extremely corrupt pagan population of the city, which is signified by the very vivid expression: **thou dwellest even where Satan's seat is**, and was subjected to a heavy persecution, during which the Lord's faithful witness Antipas was killed. Although many have tried to interpret the name **Antipas** in a symbolical sense, it is known from the martyrologies that have come down to us that Antipas was the Bishop of Pergamum and was burned inside a heated-up brass bull for his zealous confession of the faith of Christ [in 92]. However, the Lord also points to negative phenomena in the life of the Church of Pergamum, in particular the fact that the Nicolaitans had appeared there, making the eating of sacrifices to the idols and every kind of lustful indecencies lawful. In their time the Israelites had been drawn to such excesses by Barlaam. Pergamum is situated to the north of Smyrna and in antiquity it rivalled Smyrna and Ephesus. It had a temple to the pagan divinity Aesculapius, the protector of doctors. Its priests practised medicine and put up a strong resistance to the preachers of Christianity." (Archbishop Averky)

"The **sharp sword** is the evangelical teaching, which comes out of the mouth of our Lord. For He cuts off the excesses of this world and pierces the curtain hindering contemplation of the heavens." (Patriarch Anthimus)

Pergamum was the administrative centre of Asia, which meant that it was also the centre of the worship of Caesar, to whom an altar was dedicated. This is the explanation of the phrase **Satan's seat**. Lenin's mausoleum in Moscow was constructed on the model of this altar.[78]

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[78] See *Orthodox Russia*, N 17 (1566), September 1/14, 1996, pp. 13-14 (in Russian).

Tikhomirov writes: "We consider the age of Pergamum to be the beginning of Christian statehood. Does that mean that the Church, in entering into union with the state, committed a sin? Of course not. The state is not in itself **satan's** institution. Obedience to the authorities is commanded by Christ Himself and the apostles. But the union with earthly power does create many difficulties and temptations for the Church."[79]

The epoch of the Seven Ecumenical Councils spanned over four and a half centuries, from the First Council at Nicaea in 325, at which Arianism was condemned, to the Seventh Council, again at Nicaea, in 787. This epoch was characterised by, on the one hand, external peace for the Church through that "symphony" between Church and State first established by Constantine and later strengthened by his successors Theodosius and Justinian, and, on the other hand, by great internal upheavals produced by a series of Trinitarian and Christological heresies. Towards the end of the period, the internal upheavals threatened to destroy the Church-State "symphony" completely, the imperial Balaks siding with the heretical Balaams to persecute the Church, which descended into a semi-underground existence. In 842, however, with the enthronement of the Orthodox emperors Michael and Theodora, lasting peace was restored. The Church celebrated the Triumph of Orthodoxy, and the empire entered into one of the most prosperous periods of its existence.

However, it was also during this period that the scourge of Islam overtook most of the East, which had succumbed to the heresies of Monophysitism and Monothelitism. Evidently the Eastern Christians failed to heed the warning: **Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.** Eventually Islam conquered even the Byzantine Empire after it had entered into union with the Roman Catholics at the council of Florence in 1439.

2.17. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth except he that receiveth it.

"This manna is… the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is **the bread which came down from heaven** and gave Himself for the life of the world." (Patriarch Anthimus)

"We all know that the body is subject to hunger and thirst and needs food and drink, by which the unpleasant feelings of hunger and thirst are quenched, the sense of taste is sweetened, strength is restored and the loss of matter in the make-up of the body is made up. But is not the spirit also subject to hunger and thirst? Does it not have need of food? What can nourish it in a manner fitting to it? Do we know as clearly about the spirit as we do about the body?

[79] Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 563.

"The only self-sufficient essence is God, He is always full and abundant in every good in Himself, never does He experience want from outside, and consequently He has no need of food. The spirit of man, as being created and unceasingly dependent on God, is not self-sufficient, because it is not God; and, not being self-sufficient, it needs to acquire the sufficiency that is necessary for it, or take food in a manner that is fitting to it. His will hunger for the good like food; his mind thirsts for the truth like drink. But he does not have the root of good in himself, nor the source of truth in himself; it is necessary that these be given him. In God is the root of good, in God is the source of truth; consequently, the feeding of the spirit requires, not that which rises from the earth, but that which descends from heaven – **manna. Bread** that is purely **heavenly** not only by its origin but by its nature must not be placed on the earth before the eyes of the body; the water of life must not be poured into a vessel made of dead matter; which is why the true food of the spirit is **hidden** for the flesh.

"The Word of God often speaks of this food, allowing us to know and feel our essential hunger and acquire saving food. And the incarnate Wisdom declares: **I am the living Bread that came down from heaven: if anyone eats from this bread, he will live to the ages** (John 6.51). And to the Samaritan woman He declares: **Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life** (John 4.14). And again: **Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God** (Matthew 4.4). The apostle describes the true Christians as **having tasted the heavenly gift, and become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come** (Hebrews 6.4-5)."[80]

"The metaphorical expression, **a white stone**, has its foundation in a custom of antiquity, according to which the victors at the public games and contests were given white stone tablets, which they later presented in order to receive the rewards conferred on them. Among Roman judges it was the custom to collect votes by means of white and black stones. White signified freedom; black signified condemnation. In the mouth of the seer of mysteries, John, the white stone symbolically signified the purity and innocence of Christians for which they receive a reward in the future age." (Archbishop Averky)

In the Celtic Church, as has been revealed recently in archaeological excavations on the Isle of Man, white stones were placed in the graves of believers, probably signifying their hope of justification in the future life.

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[80] Metropolitan Philaret, *Sermons and Speeches,* vol. III, pp. 364-365; in Barsov, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

According to St. Hippolytus of Rome, the white stone is the teaching which a bishop imparts to the faithful immediately after their baptism and which must not be revealed before.[81]

St. Jerome writes: "**You shall be called by a new name** (Isaiah 62.2). A new name is deserving of a new son. So in the Apocalypse, **To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written** (2.17). The new name is that of Christians."[82]

"To give names to new members of a kingdom is characteristic of kings and masters. The Heavenly King also will give to all the chosen sons of His Kingdom new names which will signify their inward qualities, their designation and service in the Kingdom of glory. But since no one **knoweth the things of a man, except the spirit of a man which is in him** (I Corinthians 2.11), so also the new name given to a man by the All-knowing Master will be known only to the one who receives this name (cf. Isaiah 62.2)." (Archbishop Averky)

[81] St. Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, 23.
[82] St. Jerome, *Homily 25 on Psalm 97.*

4. The Church of Thyateira

2.18-20. And unto the angel of the Church in Thyateira write: These things saith the Son of God, Who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezabel, who calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.

"The Church of Thyateira is the fourth period, the period of the blossoming of Christianity among the new peoples of Europe...

"Thyateira was a small city in Lydia, which was not noted for anything in history, but is known in the history of Christianity for the fact that from it came Lydia, who was enlightened with the light of the faith of Christ by the holy Apostle Paul during his second preaching journey in the city of Philippi." (Archbishop Averky)

The "new peoples" mentioned by Archbishop Averky are the Slavic peoples of Northern and Eastern Europe, who began to enter the Orthodox Church from the ninth century onwards. By the end of the Middle Ages, the Slavs constituted by far the largest and most powerful part of the Orthodox commonwealth, although the whole of Russia still formed only one metropolia of the Great Church of Constantinople. Indeed, while the Great Church herself began to decline from about the eleventh century, her daughter Churches in Serbia, Russia and Georgia reached perhaps their greatest peaks in this period, fully justifying the Lord's praise of their **works and charity and service and faith and patience**.

Who is **Jezabel**? "It is known that Jezabel, the daughter of the king of Sidon, on entering into marriage with King Ahab of Israel, drew him to the worship of all the abominations of Tyre and Sidon, and was the cause of the Israelites' fall into idol-worship." (Archbishop Averky) Figuratively speaking, if the Church of Thyateira is the Orthodox Church from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries, then it is clear that the prophetess Jezabel can be none other than *the heretical Roman papacy*. Female figures in Holy Scripture usually symbolise false churches or religions; and the papacy became false when she was anathematised by the Orthodox Church in 1054. She **calls herself a prophetess** because she presumes to speak infallibly, as the mouth of God; whereas in fact, through her heresies of the Filioque (the doctrine that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son) and the universal, infallible jurisdiction of the Church of Rome, she has alienated herself from God. For she **teaches and seduces** the Lord's servants **to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols** - that is, to participate in her heresy (heresy is always called fornication and idol-worship in Holy Scripture).

It may be that the Lord is here described as having **eyes like unto a flame of fire, and feet like unto brass** in order to emphasise that He alone is Almighty and Infallible. The Lord complains that the Church **suffers** Jezabel - that is, refrains from subjecting her to the penalty of excommunication and anathema that she deserves. For even after the Church of Constantinople broke communion with the papacy in 1009, and anathematised it in 1054, some Eastern Churches continued to have communion with her.

Jezabel, who was not an Israelite by birth, dominated her husband, the king of Israel, and in the same way the papacy, having come under the rule of non-Roman popes who were strangers to the Romanist tradition of unity with the East Roman State, first brought an end to that unity and then swallowed up the State in itself.

As Dostoyevsky wrote: "The Western Church herself distorted the image of Christ, changing herself from a Church into a Roman State, and again incarnating the State in the form of the papacy... The Church was destroyed and finally transformed into a State. The papacy appeared - the continuation of the ancient Roman empire in a new incarnation."[83]

Tikhomirov writes: "One must, of course, understand this rebuke in a symbolical and spiritual sense, as an adulterous departure from God towards secular pursuits and, as is evident from history, towards human autonomy, and also as a transition to the worship of 'other gods' - like the Chernobog of the Bogomils, the Baphomet of the Templars, the Lucifer of the satanists, etc. Such actions should be called **adultery** because people calling themselves Christians fell into them. All these movements were reduced, metaphorically speaking, to **Jezabel**, who called herself a prophetess, and in actual fact went under the banner of supposedly prophetic inspirations, which are linked by the Apocalypse with **the depths of Satan**. It is not difficult to recognise these satanic depths in the antichristian magical teachings.. The word of God threatens them with punishment, which, of course, overtook them frequently."[84]

2.21-23. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. And will kill her children with death; and all the Churches shall know that I am He Who searches the reins and hearts; and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

"**I will cast her into a bed** could mean separation from the society of believers by the judgement of the Church; and **those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation** - those who secretly sympathize with and protect this heresy I will shame before all if they do not correct themselves.

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[83] Dostoyevsky, *The Pushkin Speech*, London: Unwin Books, 1960, pp. 64, 89.
[84] Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 566.

And all those who partake in and follow this abomination **I will kill with death** - which means complete cutting off from the life and good things of the Church to the ages...

"Continuing to speak in a figurative manner, He compares the cunning and deception of the heretics to a harlot, threatening to strike her with death and afflictions, as well as all who have defiled themselves with her and committed fornication before God, unless they return to Him through repentance. This is addressed to the heretics who have been deceived and who seduce others." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

For nearly two hundred years after the death of Pope Nicholas I, who first introduced the papist heresies in the ninth century, the Lord gave the West time for repentance, time to root out papism from her midst. During this period successive waves of pagan invaders - Vikings, Magyars and Saracens - poured into Western Europe, stretching the people as if on a rack of suffering, and putting the papacy herself in dire peril. Finally came the schism of 1054: the children of the papacy were killed with spiritual death.

When all the Churches saw the aggressive and far from Christian actions of the papacy after her fall from grace in 1054, they understood that the condemnation of the Roman Church had been just and the expression of the will of God.

There is much evidence of this. First, the Pope blessed the Norman invasion of England, which destroyed the traditions of English Christianity. Secondly, in the Lenten council of 1075 the Pope declared that he was above all human, and even ecclesiastical judgement, and that all authorities, both secular and ecclesiastical, were subject to him. Thirdly, he blessed the crusades against the Orthodox East, in the last of which the crusaders seized and looted Constantinople, placing a prostitute on the altar of Hagia Sophia and Latin "bishops" in all the major sees of the East. Fourthly, he blessed the invasion of Russia by the Teutonic knights - it was only through the heroic efforts of the Prince of Novgorod, St. Alexander Nevsky, that the last outpost of Orthodoxy in the North was preserved. Fifthly, he convened the false councils of Lyons in 1274 and of Florence in 1438-39, in which he tried, by dint of violence and bribery, to persuade the Orthodox emperor and patriarchs to accept his heresies and his dominion over them. Sixthly, he proclaimed the false dogmas of the immaculate conception of the Virgin in 1854 and of his own infallibility in 1870. And seventhly, in 1841 his followers, the Croatian Ustasi, murdered 750,000 Orthodox Serbs in Croatia.

Archbishop Averky considers the falling away of the papacy to have been the first stage in that **mystery of iniquity** and **apostasy** which, according to St. Paul, will precede the coming of the Antichrist (II Thessalonians 2.3, 7). "The first important stage on the path of this **apostasy** was the falling away from Orthodoxy of the Latin West, with the papal throne at its head. Was not there an antichristian principle at the base of the papist pretensions to be the

infallible 'vicar of the Son of God' on earth? Cannot the spirit of Antichrist be felt in this striving to 'be the vicar' as if 'substituting' itself for Christ in all those who believe in Him? And is not the spirit of antichristian pride, so evidently leading people into spiritual deception in the spiritual life, is not the boundless love of power which thirsts to subject the whole world to itself - is not all this characteristic of the Antichrist?

"Such a perversion of the spirit of Christ in western Christianity which had fallen away from Orthodoxy brought in its train a whole series of false teachings and a terrible moral corruption. Only the appearance of Christianity was left, its exterior, deprived of the true spirit of life in Christ..."[85]

2.24-25. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyateira, as many as have not this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say: I will not put upon you any other burden. But that which you have already, hold fast until I come.

"To the simple people He says: 'Since you, in your simplicity, are not able to stand against the cunning and clever, for, as you affirm, you do not fully know the depths of Satan - therefore I do not ask you to wage hostile battle in words, but only to preserve the teaching which you have received, until the time when I shall take you from her.'" (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

"Such is the mercy of Christ towards those who are blinded but who have not been torn away from the holy Church of Christ, which takes upon herself the task of petitioning for the ignorance of the people before God." (St. John of Kronstadt)

"**The depths of Satan** is the name given here to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, as the forerunners of the Gnostics, who called their false teaching 'the depths of God'" (Archbishop Averky). But, according to the eschatological interpretation, **the depths of Satan** is the satanic pride of the papacy and the false teaching on papal infallibility. The Lord calls the Orthodox Christians of the Thyateira period of Church history to preserve their faith unharmed until His appearance, which means "either His Second Coming at the end of the ages, or the death of each one of us" (Patriarch Anthimus).

"I send to you no new doctrine; but keep that which you have received to the end." (The Venerable Bede)

2.26-27. And he that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall shepherd them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of My Father.

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[85] Averky, "On the Situation of the Orthodox Christian in the Contemporary World", *True Orthodoxy and the Contemporary World,* Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1971, pp. 18-19 (in Russian).

"**To him who does My works will I give power**, as promised in the Gospel, over five or ten cities (Luke 19.17-19). Or else this indicates the judgement of unbelievers, through which those who have been deceived, being judged by the believers in Christ, will be crushed as a pot is by the rod: **the men of Nineveh shall rise in judgement with this generation, and shall condemn it** (Matthew 12.41). The words, **even as I received of My Father**, are spoken in His human nature, because of His acceptance of flesh." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

Another possible interpretation of these words is that that nation which overcomes the temptation of union with the heretical papacy will be given power over other nations; for it is precisely the true faith, Orthodoxy, which **overcometh the world** (I John 5.4) - spiritually in the first place, but also, if God wills it, politically in the form of the Christian Empire.

"This is a consoling promise for all the Christians of the Eastern Orthodox Church, witnessing that she will remain until the end rightly dividing the word of Divine truth and a faithful preserver of the apostolic tradition. As a reward for this unshakeable faithfulness she is promised power over the pagans" (St. John of Kronstadt).

Now after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, which followed as a punishment for the betrayal of Orthodoxy at the council of Florence, the Greeks' **power over the nations**, their Empire, came to an end. In the place of the New Rome, however, came the Third Rome - Moscow, which, having rejected the council of Florence, began to grow into a world empire from that time, ruling the nations **with a rod of iron**.

Thus in 1589 Patriarch Jeremiah of Constantinople travelled to Moscow to enthrone the Muscovite Metropolitan Job as his fellow-patriarch and to confirm the ecumenical authority of Tsar Theodore, writing: "Since the First Rome fell through the Apollinarian heresy, and the second Rome, which is Constantinople, is held by the infidel Turks, so thy great Russian kingdom, most pious Tsar… is the Third Rome… and thou alone under heaven art Christian emperor for all Christians in the world."[86]

Tikhomirov writes: "In the Thyateiran age there also appeared as a Christian country - Russia, which took a very active participation in shepherding the pagans **with a rod of iron**… In the Constantinopolitan Church, subdued by the infidels, there was not, of course, any power over the pagans. But the Russian half of the Greco-Russian Church shepherded the pagans with a rod of iron like few countries, and by her missionary activity penetrated to the furthest boundaries of Northern Asia."[87]

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[86] Quoted by Sir Steven Runciman, *The Orthodox Churches and the Secular State*, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 51.
[87] Tikhomirov, op. cit., pp. 565, 566.

A Greek prophecy of the ninth century predicted this rise of Russia: "After the chosen people of the Jews gave up their Messiah and Redeemer to torment and a shameful death, they were no longer counted a chosen people and this honour passed to the Greeks, a second chosen people.

"The searching and inquisitive mind of the Ancient Greeks was enlightened by Christianity and penetrated to the very depths of knowledge. The great Eastern Church Fathers defined the Christian dogmas and created the harmonious system of Christian teaching. This is the great merit of the Greek people. However, the Roman [Byzantine] State is not creative or strong enough to build up a harmonious political and social life on a solid Christian foundation. The sceptre of the Orthodox Empire will fall from the weak hands of the Emperors of Constantinople who are unable to achieve symphony and concord between Church and State.

"For this reason the Lord through His Providence shall send a third chosen people to succeed the spiritually weakened Greeks. This people will appear in the North within 100-200 years [these prophecies were set down in Palestine 150-200 years before the Baptism of the Russian people], and will become Christian wholeheartedly. They will strive to live according to the commandments of Christ and will seek first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, as Christ our Saviour showed us. The Lord God will love this people for their zeal and will add unto them all things - huge territories, riches, a mighty and glorious State."[88]

2.28-29. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

"Christ is **the morning star**, Who promises and reveals to the saints the eternal light of life, when the night of the world is past." (The Venerable Bede)

"These words have a dual interpretation. The Prophet Isaiah gives the name **morning star** to Satan, who fell from heaven (14.12). In this sense these words refer to the dominion of the believing Christians over Satan (cf. Luke 10.18-19). On the other hand, the holy Apostle Peter in his second catholic epistle calls the Lord Jesus Christ the **morning star**, which shines in the hearts of men (1.19). In this sense the true Christian is promised the enlightenment of his soul with the light of Christ and participation in the future heavenly glory." (Archbishop Averky)

"St. Andrew says of the **morning star**, that there is nothing astonishing in the fact that it could have two opposite interpretations, a thing which often happens in Holy Scripture. What is important to understand is the *meaning* of

[88] Archbishop Seraphim, "The Destinies of Russia", *The Orthodox Herald*, January-February, 1996 (in Russian); Fomin, op. cit., pp. 316-318; translated in Fr. Andrew Phillips, *Orthodox Christianity and the English Tradition*, English Orthodox Trust, 1995, p. 299.

the image. Here it means the same thing that victorious Christians have Christ the **morning star** shining in their hearts, and to say that they have dominion over satan the **morning star** through the grace of Christ."[89]

"**And I will give him the morning star.** This probably means that the Russian Church will be given the Light of Christ which enlightens everybody, so as to introduce it into the countries held in the power of the dragon; not the light of Jesuitical papism or Protestant apostasy from the holy Church, but the true Light of Christ, the Light of Eastern Catholic Orthodoxy." (St. John of Kronstadt)

And indeed, from the sixteenth century onwards, the Russian Orthodox Empire began to acquire power over vast pagan territories in East European Russia, Siberia and Central Asia; and the Russian Church sent missions to convert the pagans of these territories to the True Faith. This missionary activity produced great fruit in Siberia, Central Asia, China, Japan and Alaska. It was cut short only by the revolution of 1917.

[89] Rose, op. cit., p. 87, note.

5. The Church of Sardis

3.1-4. And unto the angel of the Church in Sardis write: These things saith He that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Yet thou hast a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with Me in white; for they are worthy.

"He reproves this angel, that is, the bishop, for not being sufficiently diligent in correcting the bad. He commends him, however, in that he has some who walk in white, and the name 'Sardis' agrees with these, as being the name of a precious stone. To you yourself, indeed, you seem to be alive. But if you art not watchful in the correction of the wicked, you will from now on be numbered among the dead. He said not a 'few', but **a few names**. For **He calleth His own sheep by name**, Who knew Moses by name, and Who writes the names of the saints in heaven." (The Venerable Bede)

"The Lord orders the Angel of the Church of Sardis to write more in reproach than in consolation: this Church contains only the name of living faith, but in actual fact she is spiritually dead. The Lord threatens the Sardian Christians with sudden catastrophe if they do not repent. There are, however, a very few who **have not defiled their garments**. Those who overcome (the passions) the Lord promises to clothe in white garments, and their names will not be erased from the book of life, but they will be confessed by the Lord before His Heavenly Father..." (Archbishop Averky)

For **whosoever shall confess in Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father Who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father Who is in heaven** (Matthew 10.32-33; cf. Mark 8.38).

"In antiquity Sardis was a large and rich city, the capital of the province of Lydia, but now it is the poor little Turkish village of Sard... Under Julian the Apostate the spiritual deadness of this city was clearly revealed: it quickly returned to idol-worship, for which it was struck by the wrath of God - it was destroyed to its foundations.

"The Church of Sardis is the epoch of humanism and materialism of the 16th to 18th centuries." (Archbishop Averky)

This definition might be modified to read: "of the 16th to early 20th centuries"; for the humanist and materialist influences upon the Orthodox Church continued and became stronger right up to the First World War.

After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, which took place only five and a half months after the name of the Pope was commemorated for the first time in Hagia Sophia, many Greek scholars and artists fled to the West, where their knowledge of pagan classical culture served as an important impetus to the development of humanism, and then - of Protestantism. Later, the pagan ideals of Humanism spread to the Orthodox East, especially Russia (the Greek and Balkan lands were to a certain degree protected from western influence by the Turkish yoke). This influence constantly undermined the foundations of Orthodox piety and led, in the end, to the logical conclusion of the Western "Renaissance" and the most terrible expression of the wrath of God - the Russian revolution of 1917.

"[Protestantism] is a deadening of the spirit that denies the visible expression of piety in anything, whether it be a bow or the sign of the cross, or the rest of that which has been preserved from the apostolic institutions concerning the performance of the holy sacraments and the sacred rites. This heresy probably developed also in Sardis, which is why this church turns out to be dead for good works." (St. John of Kronstadt)

The humanism, materialism and Protestantism of the Sardis epoch in the history of the Church were a reaction to the perverted Christianity of the medieval papacy. It therefore constituted, according to Archbishop Averky, the second stage of the apostasy - "the epoch of the 'Renaissance', which appeared as a reaction to the perverted Christianity of the West, but which was in essence a denial of Christianity and a return to the ideals of paganism. It proclaimed the cult of a strong, healthy, beautiful human flesh, and to the spirit of Christian humility it opposed the spirit of self-opinion, self-reliance, and the deification of human 'reason'.

"As a protest against perverted Christianity, on the soil of the same humanistic ideal that recognised 'reason' as the highest criterion of life, there appeared in the West a religious movement which received the name of 'Protestantism'. Protestantism with its countless branches of all kinds of sects not only radically distorted the whole teaching of true Christianity, but also rejected the very dogma of the Church, placing man himself as his own highest authority, and even going so far as to deny faith in the Divinity of Jesus Christ, the Founder of the Church.

"Puffed-up human pride finally falls completely away from God, and begins boldly to deny even the very existence of God, and man proclaims himself to be as it were a god. Seized with pride, self-opinion and reliance on his own limitless powers, possibilities and capacities, man brought up on the ideals of the 'Renaissance' no longer sees any obligation for himself to strive for the spiritual perfection enjoined by the Gospel, and by a natural progression descends deeper and deeper into the abyss of spiritual fall and moral corruption. Into the foreground there steps the service of the flesh, as a consequence of which spiritual demands are more and more stifled, suppressed and, finally, so as once and for all to finish with the unpleasant

voice of conscience which lives in the spirit of man, the spirit itself is declared to be non-existent.

"In this way, there appears 'materialism' - a natural child of 'humanism', a natural and logical development of its idea. The ideal of the full stomach, covered by the raucous 'doctrine' going by the name of 'the ideal of social justice', 'social righteousness', became the highest ideal of humanity which had denied Christ. And this is understandable! The so-called 'social question' could not have taken hold if people had remained faithful to true Christianity incarnate in life.

"On the soil of materialism, in its turn, there naturally grew, as a strictly logical consequence, the doctrines of 'Socialism' and 'Marxism-Communism'. Humanism and materialism, having denied the spiritual principle in man, proclaimed man himself to be a 'god' and legitimised human pride and animal egoism as self-sacrificing, and came to the conclusion that savage struggle should be made the law of human life, on the soil of the constant conflict of interests of egoistical human beings. As a result of this so-called 'struggle for existence', stronger, cleverer, craftier people would naturally begin to constrain and oppress the less strong, less clever and less crafty. The law of Christ, which commands us to **bear one another's burdens** (Galatians 6.2), and **not to please ourselves** (Acts 15.29), but **to love one's neighbour as oneself** (Matthew 22.39), was expelled from life. And so so-called 'social evil' and 'social injustices' began to increase and multiply, together with the 'social ulcers' of society. And since life was made more and more intolerable, as a consequence of the ever-increasing egoism and violence of people towards each other, there was naturally some reason to think about establishing for all a single tolerable and acceptable order of life. Hence 'Socialism', and then its extreme expression, 'Communism', became fashionable doctrines, which promised people deliverance from all 'social injustices' and the establishment on earth of a peaceful and serenely paradisal life, in which everyone would be happy and content. But these teachings determined to cure the ulcers of human society by unsuitable means. They did not see that the evil of contemporary life is rooted in the depths of the human soul which has fallen away from the uniquely salvific Gospel teaching, and naively thought that it would be enough to change the imperfect, in their opinion, structure of political and social life for there to be immediately born on earth prosperity for all, and life would become paradise. For this inevitable, as they affirmed, and beneficial change, the more extreme Socialists, as, for example, the Communists, even proposed violent measures, going so far as the shedding of blood and the physical annihilation of people who did not agree with them. In other words: they thought to conquer evil by evil, this evil being still more bitter and unjust because of their cruelty and mercilessness.

"'The Great French Revolution', which shed whole rivers of human blood, was the first of their attempts. It clearly demonstrated that men are powerless to build their life on earth without God, and to what terrible consequences man is drawn by his apostasy from Christ and His saving teaching.

"But there was no looking back: the process of **apostasy** (II Thessalonians 2.3) had already gone too far..."[90]

A characteristic feature of the Sardis period in the history of the Church, which reflected the decline of Orthodox Christianity and its increasing conformity to the world, was the subservient position of the Orthodox Churches to the secular powers. Thus the Patriarch of Constantinople, having been appointed the secular as well as the religious head of all Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman empire, was forced to bribe the Sultan with ever-increasing sums of money in order to obtain his office - a system that led to numerous abuses. In Russia, too, a Protestant, synodal type of Church government was imposed upon the Church by Peter the Great, while he and his successors introduced general westernization and oppressed the monasteries.

"Sardis stood on [an] impregnable lookout 457.5 metres - 1500 feet - above the plain. Cyrus's men climbed the cliff face at night when the guards where asleep. They came like a thief in the night."[91] Therefore **be watchful**. In the same way, the seemingly impregnable position of the Orthodox Church in the Sardis period of Church history came to a sudden end with the Russian revolution, which caught many Christians spiritually asleep.

3.4-6. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment. And I will not blot out his name from out of the book of life. And I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

"The words **defiled garments** metaphorically depict pollutions of the soul. So those **who have not defiled their garments** are those whose minds remained untainted by heretical false teachings, whose life was not stained by passions and vices. By the words **white garments** are to be understood the wedding garments in which will be clothed the guests at the wedding feast of the son of the king, under which image the Lord parabolically represented the future blessedness of the righteous in His Heavenly Kingdom. These garments, which will be like the garments of the Saviour during the Transfiguration, have been made **white as light** (Matthew 17.2). God's decrees concerning the destinies of people are symbolically represented under the image of a book in which the Lord as the all-knowing and all-righteous Judge writes down all their deeds. This symbolic image is often used in the Sacred Scriptures (Psalm 68.29; Psalm 138.16; Isaiah 4.3; Daniel 7.10; Malachi 3.16; Exodus 32.32-33; Luke 10.20; Philippians 4.3). In accordance with this representation, he who lives worthy of the higher calling is as it were

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[90] Averky, "On the Situation of the Orthodox Christian in the Contemporary World", *True Orthodoxy in the Contemporary World,* Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1971, pp. 19-21 (in Russian).

[91] Clem Clack, *The Bible in Focus*. Blackburn, Australia, 1980, p. 147.

inscribed in the book of life, while he who lives unworthily is as it were erased from this book, thereby depriving himself of the right to eternal life. Therefore the promise to him who conquers sin not to erase his name from the book of life is equivalent to the promised not to deprive him of the heavenly good things prepared in the future life for the righteous. **And I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels** - this is the same as that which the Lord promised to His true followers during His life on earth (Matthew 10.32), that is, I will recognise and pronounce him to be My faithful disciple." (Archbishop Averky)

Amidst the general corruption of Church life in the Sardis period some saints shone like stars. These included the holy new martyrs of the Turkish yoke in Greece and the Balkans, and such saints as Tikhon of Zadonsk and Seraphim of Sarov in Russia. This shows that even in conditions of spiritual decline God preserves His faithful witnesses, and that **the gates of hell will never prevail** over His Church (Matthew 16.18).

"They not only acquired the grace of Holy Baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit themselves, but also, in preaching the word of truth, they kept the apostolic tradition, and not human wisdom, which does not give knowledge of God. For it is written: **I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and I will reject the understanding of the prudent** (Isaiah 29.14). From this we can conclude that several people in Sardis were praised because they did not defile their preaching with the unruliness of an unrestrained mind, as has happened everywhere that the religion of knowledge, like a hellish flame, has begun to break out of the bowels of the earth and singe the faith both of the people who are going blind in their hearts and, no less, of the young who are going blind in the theological and secular nurseries of knowledge. One must not be surprised that in all only a few people were found who rightly divided the word of truth, for the apostle says: **though you have thousands of instructors in Christ, you have few fathers** (I Corinthians 4.15)." (St. John of Kronstadt)

Tikhomirov writes: "The Sardian epoch is already essentially dead, and of course creates material for the Laodicean church… But beside this, all those whom Christ in the Sardian epoch calls to repentance and who wear **white garments** by their spiritual enthusiasm give a beginning to the Philadelphian Church."[92]

[92] Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 569.

6. The Church of Philadelphia

3.7. And to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia write:

The angel of the Church of Philadelphia addressed here was Demetrius, whom St. John contrasted with the unrighteous Diotrephes (III John 12).

"Philadelphia is interpreted 'brotherly love', and to it is the door of the Kingdom opened, and the promise made of being beloved by the Lord." (The Venerable Bede)

"Philadelphia is the second large city in Lydia, being named thus after its founder, Attalus Philadelphus, the king of Pergamum. This city was the only one of all the cities of Asia Minor which did not give in for a long time to the Turks... The Turks call Philadelphia 'Allah-Sher', that is, 'the city of God', and this name involuntarily recalls the promise of the Lord: **I shall write on him who conquers the name of My God and the name of the city of My God** (v. 12)...

"The Church of Philadelphia is the next-to-last period in the life of the Church of Christ, the epoch contemporary to us, when the Church will in fact have **little strength** in contemporary humanity and new persecutions will begin, when patience will be required." (Archbishop Averky)

There is a striking contrast between the Churches of Sardis and Philadelphia. The former is prosperous externally but poor internally. The latter is few in numbers and under great pressure from enemies, but receives the most unqualified praise of all the Churches.

Such is the difference in the condition of the Orthodox Church before and after the watershed years 1914-24.

In 1914 the Church stood at the highest peak of Her power from an external point of view. Although the Middle East was still under the Moslem yoke, the Orthodox Balkan States had been liberated after centuries of Turkish domination; and the mighty Russian empire spread from the Baltic to the Pacific with important Church missions in Persia, Central Asia, China, Japan and America. Fifteen years later, the situation had completely changed. The Russian empire was gone, her peoples crushed by war, famine and the fanatical persecution of a small band of militant atheists; and the missions abroad, though swelled by many émigrés, were rent by schisms and difficulties of various kinds. In 1924, moreover, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, together with the State Church of Greece and the Church of Romania, had fallen into the schism of the new calendar, which heralded a devastating new heresy - "the heresy of heresies" - ecumenism.

However, in the midst of all this turmoil, the faith of many hitherto lukewarm Christians was renewed; a new age of martyrdom fully

comparable to that of the first three centuries began. For although, writes Tikhomirov, "the Philadelphian Church will be numerically small and will not have an external position like that of the Sardian or Laodicean Churches, it will be morally so powerful that she will attract the Jews to herself".[93]

And so a promise was given to the faithful:

3.7. These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth:

According to Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, **the key of David** is the Cross of Christ, whereby He was given power to open heaven and hell.[94] According to the Venerable Bede, it is "royal power".

In some ancient manuscripts, it is written **the key of hell** instead of **the key of David**.[95]

"By **the key of David** is understood that power which His humanity received from the Divinity, as He said after His resurrection: **All power has been given to Me in heaven and on earth** (Matthew 28.18). This power He also gave to His disciples, and it is called a **key**, as He said to Peter: **I give thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven** (Matthew 16.19), that is, to loose and to bind sins. To open and to shut means to justify a man from his sins and to condemn the impenitent." (Patriarch Anthimus)

"**The key of David** is the key to the prophetic book of David, which is called the Psalter, and to all the prophecies which holy men of God uttered under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Who opens the treasuries of knowledge. The particular quality of these treasuries lies in the fact that they cannot be withstood by the wise men of this world, for that which is opened by Divine truth cannot be eclipsed by human wisdom, and that which **the key of David** (the Holy Spirit) closes to the curiosity of the human mind no mind can open." (St. John of Kronstadt)

"The Son of God calls Himself **the key of David** in the sense of having the supreme authority in the house of David, for a key is the symbol of power. The house of David, or the Kingdom of David, is the same as the Kingdom of God, whose foreshadowing it was in the Old Testament." (Archbishop Averky)

The phrase **the key of David** recalls a prophecy from Isaiah: **I will give him the glory of David; and he shall rule, and there shall be none to shut;**

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[93] Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 570.
[94] Metropolitan Philaret, *Sermons and Speeches*, vol. 5, Moscow, 1885, p. 488 (in Russian); cited by Ivan Marchevsky, *An Apocalyptic Perspective on the End of Time in a Patristic Synthesis*, Sophia: "Monarkhichesko-Konservativen Seyuz", 1994, p. 84 (in Bulgarian).
[95] Marchevsky, op. cit., p. 84.

and he shall shut, and there shall be none to open (22.22). These words were spoken, in the first place, of Eliakim, the chief minister of King Hezekiah of Judah, who was to succeed to the office of the high priest and temple treasurer Somnas. Jewish tradition relates that Somnas wished to betray the people of God and flee to the Assyrian King Sennacherib; and St. Cyril of Alexandria says of him: "On receiving the dignity of the high-priesthood, he abused it, going to the extent of imprisoning everybody who contradicted him."[96]

The picture, then, is one of betrayal at the highest level in the Church at a time of maximum pressure from outside. The Lord, however, as First Hierarch of the Church, promises His faithful remnant that the power of the keys - the charisma of the priesthood, the power to bind and to loose - will remain among them (cf. I Peter 2.25; Matthew 16.19). However much the false priests will strive to exclude the faithful from the Church by means of bans and excommunications, their efforts will come to nothing because the Lord will not recognise their repressive measures - the door into the sacred enclosure of the Church will remain open to the sheep who know His voice (John 10.9).

For there is no infallible authority but God - this is the teaching of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. And while the Church is **the pillar and ground of the truth** (I Timothy 3.15), we cannot be certain that any individual Church or hierarch will remain in the Truth. For **the Spirit** of truth **blows where it wills** (John 3.8). As St. Columbanus of Luxeuil wrote to one of the Popes: "[If you err], then those who have always kept the Orthodox Faith, whoever they may have been, even if they seem to be your subordinates,… shall be your judges.. And thus, even as your honour is great in proportion to the dignity of your see, so great care is needful for you, lest you lose your dignity through some mistake. For power will be in your hands just so long as your principles remain sound; for he is the appointed keybearer of the Kingdom of heaven, who opens by true knowledge to the worthy and shuts to the unworthy; otherwise if he does the opposite, he shall be able neither to open nor to shut..."[97]

Now betrayal at the highest level was a tragic feature of Orthodox Church life in the 1920s. Thus Greek and Romanian hierarchs sought to betray their flocks into union with western heretics, the first step to which was the introduction of the papal calendar in 1924. However, they were foiled, at least in part, by the determined opposition of a handful of priests and several hundred thousand laymen. Again, in Russia, certain bishops and clergy created the so-called "Living Church" with the blessing of the Soviets in opposition to the true Church led by Patriarch Tikhon. This heretical schism was eventually crushed, but only after wreaking great damage on the Church

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[96] St. Cyril, *P.G* 70, 516B.

[97] G.S.M. Walker (ed.), *Sancti Columbani Opera*, 1970, The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, pp. 47, 49, 51.

with the loss of millions of souls. Then, in 1927, came the still more destructive schism of Metropolitan Sergius of Nizhni-Novgorod, who published a declaration placing the official Russian Church into submission to the militantly atheist State.

St. Seraphim of Sarov had prophesied a hundred years before: "The Lord has revealed to me, wretched Seraphim, that there will be great woes on the Russian land, the Orthodox faith will be trampled on, and the hierarchs of the Church of God and other clergy will depart from the purity of Orthodoxy. And for this the Lord will severely punish them. I, wretched Seraphim, besought the Lord for three days and three nights that He would rather deprive me of the Kingdom of Heaven, but have mercy on them. But the Lord replied: 'I will not have mercy on them; for they teach the teachings of men, and with their tongue honour Me, but their heart is far from Me.'"[98]

And at another time he said that the hierarchs of that time would become so impious that they would exceed in impiety the Greek hierarchs of the time of Theodosius the Younger (fifth century), so that they would not believe in the chief dogma of the faith of Christ.[99]

As Archbishop Averky writes: "Terrible upheavals, unheard of in history since the first ages of Christianity, have been lived through and are still being lived through by our Russian Orthodox Church. But it is not so much these bloody persecutions, likening her to the early Church, that are terrible in themselves, as the inner corruption which began in her and in the whole of the Orthodox Church after the Bolshevik coup. What we have in mind is that corrupting spirit which began to reveal itself openly, and which at first merged into the so-called 'living church' and 'renovationist' movement, and then - into the destructive compromise with the God-fighting communist power. *This was the spirit of Apostasy in the bowels of the Orthodox Church herself*, which engendered all kinds of divisions and schisms, both there in the Homeland enslaved by the atheists, and here, abroad. This spirit of *Apostasy* is, of course, far more dangerous and destructive for souls than open bloody persecutions. *It is the inner betrayal of Christ the Saviour with the preservation of merely external, visible faithfulness to Him*.

"Was it not about this that Bishop Theophanes the Recluse prophesied more than eighty years ago in his interpretation of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, when he said: '*Although the name of Christianity will be heard everywhere, and churches and church rites will be seen everywhere, all this will be only appearance, while within will be true apostasy* (pp. 491-492). Christ Himself in His Sermon on the Mount clearly said that **nobody can serve two masters** (Matthew 6.24); it is impossible simultaneously to serve God and Mammon, that is, **this world lying in evil**; it is impossible at one and the same time to

[98] St. Seraphim, quoted by Fomin, op. cit., p. 283.
[99] St. Seraphim, quoted by Fomin, op. cit., p. 283

please Christ and Beliar, that is, the servants of the coming Antichrist, in the person of the clear or secret God-fighting authorities (II Corinthians 6.15)."[100]

"Soon after the publication of Metropolitan Sergius' declaration," writes E. Lopeshanskaya, "Bishop Damascene [one of the faithful martyr-bishops of the Catacomb Church] had thought about the fate of the Russian Orthodox Church in the image of two of the churches of the Apocalypse: those of Philadelphia and Laodicea. The Church of Patriarch Tikhon was the Church of Philadelphia.. And next to the Church of Philadelphia was the Church of Laodicea - that of Metropolitan Sergius."[101]

Now this identification of the Philadelphian Church with the Russian Tikhonite or Catacomb Church was disputed by a fellow-martyr of Bishop Damascene's, Metropolitan Cyril of Kazan, who is reported to have said in 1934: "Not we, but those who will come after us are the Philadelphian Church."[102] However, we may suppose him to have been thinking of the latter part of the prophecy concerning the Philadelphian Church, which had not been fulfilled in his time and has not been fulfilled even now. This is the promise of **an open door** being extended to her hierarchs:

3.8. I know thy works; behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength.

The meaning of this phrase is explained by St. Paul's words: **Praying for us also, that God may open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the Mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds; that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak** (Colossians 4.3-4; cf. I Corinthians 16.9).

The Catacomb Church was in bonds for most of the twentieth century, as Paul was in Rome in the first century. Nevertheless, although the Church **suffers trouble, as an evil-doer, even unto bonds,... the word of God is not bound** (II Timothy 2.9). The Lord can **open the door of faith to the Gentiles** (Acts 14.27) now as He did then; and here He promises the Philadelphian Church, i.e. the True Orthodox Church of Russia and perhaps throughout the world, that since she has kept His word and not denied His name in the midst of the most terrible persecutions, He will release her from bondage and give her the opportunity to proclaim the word of God freely.

"These words in all probability refer to that spreading of the Gospel throughout the world which has penetrated from the Eastern Church into China, Japan, India, Persia, Africa and other pagan countries." (St. John of Kronstadt)

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[100] Averky, "On the Situation of the Orthodox Christian in the Contemporary World", op. cit.
[101] Lopeshanskaia, *Bishop-Confessors*, San Francisco, 1971, p. 91 (in Russian).
[102] Hieromartyr Cyril, quoted by Lev Regelson, *The Tragedy of the Russian Church, 1917-1945*, Paris: YMCA Press, 1977, p. 566 (in Russian).

Looking at the world from a worldly point of view, it is difficult to see how this prophecy could be fulfilled. In Russia today, it is still the Laodicean Church of Sergianist Ecumenism that is dominant rather than the Philadelphian Church of True Orthodoxy; and faith and morals are in sharp decline throughout the world. The faithful people of the Church are preparing for the coming of the Antichrist rather than a dramatic expansion of the Church of Christ.

And yet, as Tertullian said, "the blood of the Christians is the seed of the Church" - and where, if ever, has more blood been shed for Christ than in the past century in Russia? This alone should give us reason to hope for a rich harvest of souls entering the Church before the end. Moreover, there are many prophecies foretelling the resurrection of Holy Russia and a spectacular expansion of the Church throughout the world, as, for example, the following remarkable Greek prophecy dating probably from the ninth century and found in the monastery of St. Sabbas, near Jerusalem:-

"At various times this great people [the Russians] will fall into sin and for this will be chastised through considerable trials. In about a thousand years [i.e. in the 1900s] this people, chosen by God, will falter in its Faith and its standing for the Truth of Christ. It will become proud of its earthly might and glory, will cease to seek the Kingdom and will want paradise not in Heaven but on this sinful earth.

"However not all this people will tread this broad and pernicious path, though a substantial majority will, especially its governing class. On account of this great fall, a terrible fiery trial will be sent from on high to this people which will despise the ways of God. Rivers of blood shall flow across their land, brother shall slay brother, more than once famine shall visit the land and gather its dread harvest, nearly all the churches and other holy places shall be destroyed or suffer sacrilege, many shall perish.

"A part of this people, rejecting iniquity and untruth, will pass over the borders of their homeland and will be dispersed like unto the people of the Jews all over the world. Nevertheless the Lord will not show His wrath on them to the uttermost. The blood of thousands of martyrs will cry to the heavens for mercy. A spirit of sobriety will grow among this chosen people and they will return to God. At last this period of cleansing trial, appointed by the Righteous Judge, will come to an end, and once more Holy Orthodoxy will shine forth and those northern lands will be resplendent with the brightness of a faith reborn.

"This wonderful light of Christ will shine forth from there and enlighten all the peoples of the earth. This will be helped by that part of the people providentially sent ahead into the diaspora, who will create centres of Orthodoxy - churches of God all over the world.

"Christianity will then be revealed in all its heavenly beauty and fullness. Most of the peoples of the world will become Christian. And for a time a period of peace, prosperity and Christian living will come to the whole world...

"And then? Then, when the fullness of time has come, a great decline in faith will begin and everything foretold in the Holy Scriptures will occur. Antichrist will appear and the world will end."[103]

3.8. For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name.

"He shows the reason why the Church obtains these gifts, namely, that she does not trust in her own powers, but in the grace of Christ the King." (The Venerable Bede)

These words are reminiscent of the following passage from Daniel: **They shall profane the sanctuary of strength, and they shall remove the perpetual sacrifice, and make the abomination desolate. And the transgressors shall bring about a covenant by deceitful ways: but a people knowing their God shall prevail, and do valiantly. And the intelligent of the people shall understand much: yet shall they fall by the sword, and by flame, and by captivity, and by spoil of many days. And they shall be helped with a little help; but many shall attach themselves to them with treachery. And some of them that understand shall fall, to try them as fire, and to test them, and that they may be manifested at the time of the end, for the matter is yet for a set time** (11.31-35).

The parallel between this people and the Christians of the True Orthodox Church is striking. The profanation of the sanctuary of strength and the removal of the perpetual sacrifice refers to the Bolsheviks' destruction of churches and removal into prison of the priests who celebrate the Sacrifice of the Eucharist, replacing them by false priests and churches which do not have the Grace of the sacraments. The deceitfully arranged covenant refers to Metropolitan Sergius' pact with the atheists, which introduced **the abomination of desolation** - militant atheism and anti-theism - into the heart of the Church's administration. It was of just such a covenant that the Prophet Isaiah wrote: **Thus says the Lord God:... hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter. Then your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with hell will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through you will be beaten down by it...** (Isaiah 28.15, 17-19)

As for **the abomination of desolation**, this refers to the renovationist "Living Church" according to St. John of Kronstadt's vision of 1908: "We went

[103] Archbishop Seraphim, "The Destinies of Russia", *The Orthodox Herald*, January-February, 1996 (in Russian); Fomin, op. cit., pp. 316-318; translated in Phillips, op. cit., pp. 299-300.

further, and entered a big cathedral. I wanted to cross myself, but the elder said to me: 'Here is the abomination of desolation'... The cathedral, the priest, the people - these are the heretics, the apostates, the godless, who departed from the Faith of Christ and the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and recognised the renovationist living church, which does not have the Grace of Christ."[104]

The people knowing their God are the believers of the True Orthodox Church, who reject this evil covenant and abomination. They have fallen **by the sword, and by flame, and by captivity, and by spoil of many days** - over seventy years of struggle against the Soviet Antichrist. Just as the Philadelphian Church is said to have **little strength**, so these Christians are said to be helped with **a little help**; and in material and political terms they are indeed weak. **Many shall attach themselves to them with treachery** - and many traitors, KGB agents, have attached themselves to the True Orthodox Christians, causing some of them to fall temporarily, being tried **as with fire.** And all this takes place in the last days, **at the time of the end**, and yet before the final destruction of the tormentor, **the king of the north**, on the mountains of Israel (Daniel 11.36-45; cf. Ezekiel 38 and 39).

3.9. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and make obeisance before they feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

The phrase **the synagogue of Satan** was used before, in the message to the Church of Smyrna (2.9), which in Archbishop Averky's interpretation represents the second period in the history of the Church. It can be interpreted in two ways. Either it refers to the Jews, who have been at the forefront of the persecutions against the Christians in the twentieth, as in the first three centuries, or to the false brethren who have betrayed **the Israel of God** (Galatians 6.16), the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and thereby ceased to be *true* Jews, i.e. real Christians. **For he is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God** (Romans 2.28-29).

Of such true, Christian Jews it is written: **In those days ... ten men of all the languages of the nations shall take hold of the hem of a Jew, saying, We shall go with thee; for we have learned that God is with you** (Zechariah 8.23).

"Here is foretold the mass conversion of the Jews to Christ which must take place in the last, that is, the sixth period in the construction of the Holy Church... This triumphant promise relates, in all probability, to the last times,

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[104] St. John of Kronstadt, in Fomin, op. cit., pp. 137-141, *Orthodox Russia*, N 20 (517) (in Russian); translated in V. Moss, *The Imperishable Word*, Old Woking, 1980.

after the breaking of the sixth seal from the book of the destinies of the world, when great signs in the sun, the moon and the stars will begin to appear, and terrible upheavals in the elements - upheavals which will be restrained from appearing until the conversion to Christianity and return to Palestine of one hundred and forty four thousand Jews is accomplished, as we clearly see in Revelation (7.2-8). They will be regenerated, as some fathers of the Church, in particular St. Ephraim the Syrian and St. Hippolytus of Rome, have surmised, by the Prophet Elijah's preaching of the Gospel of Christ." (St. John of Kronstadt)

In the early 1920s the Church writer and hieromartyr Bishop Mark Novoselov identified the Jews in this passage with the persecutors of the Church in Bolshevik Russia. "[St. John] with complete clarity speaks about the conversion of the God-fighting people to the Church of Christ, when she, few in numbers and powerless from an external point of view, but powerful with an inner strength and faithfulness to her Lord (Revelation 3.8) will draw to herself the **remnant** of the God-fighting tribe. **Behold,** says the Lord to the Angel of the Church of Philadelphia, **I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and make obeisance before they feet, and to know that I have loved thee.**

"Gazing with the eye of faith at that which the Lord has done before our eyes, and applying the ear of our heart and mind to the events of our days, comparing that which is seen and heard with the declarations of the Word of God, I cannot but feel that a great, wonderful and joyous mystery of God's economy is coming towards us: the Judaizing haters and persecutors of the Church of God, who are striving to subdue and annihilate her, by the wise permission of Providence will draw her to purification and strengthening, so as **to present her** [to Christ] **as a glorious Church, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she should be holy and blameless** (Ephesians 6.27).

"And in His time, known only to the One Lord of time, this, according to the son of thunder's strict expression **synagogue of Satan** will bow before the pure Bride of Christ, conquered by her holiness and blamelessness and, perhaps, frightened by the image of the Antichrist. And if the rejection of the Apostle Paul's fellow-countrymen was, in his words, **the reconciliation of the world** [with God], **what will be their acceptance if not life from the dead?** (Romans 11.15)."[105]

Lev Tikhomirov agrees with this interpretation: "Is this conversion of the Jews that salvation of **all Israel** which the Apostle Paul foretold? In the Apocalypse it is said that the saved will come **of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie.** But not the whole of the **synagogue** will come, but only **of the synagogue**, that is, a part of it. But even

[105] Hieromartyr Mark, op. cit., p. 125. See also pp. 103-104.

here where the Apostle Paul says that **the whole of Israel will be saved**, he means only a part: **for they are not all Israel, which are of Israel… They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed** (Romans 9.6,8).

"The opinion is widespread among us that the conversion of the Jews will take place at the very appearance of the Saviour, when they shall cry out: 'Blessed is He That cometh in the name of the Lord'. But this is not evident from the Apocalypse. But if the Philadelphian conversion will bring **all Israel** that is to be saved to Christ, then this will, of course, be a great event, fully explaining the rejoicing of the Heavens. Israel is a chosen people with whom it will not be possible to find a comparison when he begins to do the work of God. The Jews will, of course, multiply the forces of Christianity for the resistance against the Antichrist. **If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world,** says the Apostle Paul, **what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?** (Romans 11.15)."[106]

3.10-11. Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon the whole world, to try those that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

"Because you have kept My example in suffering adversity, I also will keep you from the impending afflictions, not, indeed, that you may not be tempted, but that you may not be overcome by adversity… Do not grow weary in endurance, for I will help you quickly, in case another, through your failure, receive the reward which was decreed for you. So it is impossible that the number of the saints which is fixed with God should be diminished by the faithlessness of the increasing tares. For if the lost crown is delivered to another, the place of him who has lost it is not vacant." (The Venerable Bede)

"These words confirm the supposition that we must understand by the Philadelphian Church one of the churches of the last years before the end of the world. And its preservation from the hour of temptation or that great sorrow which must come on the whole universe, must be understood to mean that those who remain faithful to Christ will not be left here to be tempted by ecclesiastical deception, but will soon be released from the bonds of life her and in an innumerable host will appear before Christ immediately after the conversion of the Jews." (St. John of Kronstadt)

Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth (Luke 21.34-35).

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[106] Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 570.

Thus "at that time there will be an increased danger of losing faith because of the multitude of temptations. On the other hand, the reward for faithfulness will be, so to speak, right at hand. Therefore it is necessary to be especially watchful so as not to lose the possibility of salvation through lightmindedness, as, for example, the wife of Lot lost it." (Archbishop Averky)

For **the righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in whatever day he shall transgress** (Ezekiel 33.12).

"In this second interpretation, the **hour of temptation** is virtually synonymous with the **great tribulation** which will come just before the end of the world, when **the days will be shortened** for the sake of the elect and **immediately after the tribulation of those days** the end of everything will come (Matthew 24.21,22,29)."[107]

3.12-13. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God; and I will write upon him My new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches.

According to the ancient author Strabo, Philadelphia was frequently subject to earthquakes, and during the earthquakes the citizens had to flee out of the city. Russia in the twentieth century is an earthquake zone in the spiritual sense, and many millions have fled abroad and into the catacombs. But the faithful Christian will escape unharmed from all the traumas that the Russian people has had to undergo. Just as the Philadelphian Christian of the first century was promised that he would not have to **go out** any more, i.e. flee from his house in case it fell on top of him, so the True Russian Christian of the twentieth century is promised that he will not have to flee abroad or into the catacombs any more, but will remain as **a pillar in the temple of My God.**

St. Clement of Rome writes: "The Church is not of the present age, but is from above. For She is spiritual, like our Jesus, and was revealed in the last times in order to save us. And the Church, though spiritual, was revealed in the Flesh of Christ... If we do the will of our Father, God, we shall belong to the first Church, the spiritual one, which was created before the sun and moon. But if we do not the will of the Lord, we shall fall under the scripture which says: **My house is become a den of thieves** (Jeremiah 7.11; Matthew 21.23)."[108]

"The placing of a **pillar** in the Church of Christ which has not been vanquished by the gates of hell (figuratively represented here in the form of a

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[107] Rose, op. cit., p. 96, note.
[108] *II Clement*, 14, 1.

house) indicates that the one who overcomes in temptations belongs to the Church of Christ inviolably; that is, he has a most solid position in the Kingdom of Heaven. The high reward for such a one will also be the writing upon him of a triple name: the name of a child of God, as belonging inseparably to God; the name of a citizen of the new or heavenly Jerusalem; and the name of Christian, as an authentic member of the Body of Christ. The New Jerusalem, beyond any doubt, is the heavenly triumphant Church (21.2; Galatians 4.26), which **cometh down out of heaven** because the very origin of the Church from the Son of God, Who **came down from heaven** (John 3.13), is heavenly; it give to people heavenly gifts and raises them to heaven." (Archbishop Averky)

"We must have written in our hearts the new name of God, which is His incarnation, which took place in the new, or last times, and is newer than anything else under the sun." (Patriarch Anthimus)

7. The Church of Laodicea

3.14. And unto the angel of the Church of Laodicea write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

"Laodicea means 'the lovely tribe of the Lord', or, 'they were in vomiting'. For there were there both those to whom He said, **I will spew thee out of My mouth**, and those also to whom He said this, **Whom I love, I rebuke and chasten**." (The Venerable Bede)

"The last word of the Revelation of the Lord is addressed to the Laodicean Church, and reflects in itself the prophecy about the final condition of faith upon earth after great numbers of confessors of the Church have been taken up to the throne of God, and when, according to the expression of the Gospel, faith will hardly be found on the earth (Luke 18.8)... The message to the angel of the Church of Laodicea refers, in all probability, to the very last times." (St. John of Kronstadt)

Lev Tikhomirov writes: "In the Philadelphian Church, we must think, the pure Bride of Christ is preserved to the end of the world. But the majority of those called 'Christians' will probably fall ever lower, since the world will move into the seventh epoch, the Laodicean."[109]

"The Church of Laodicea is the last, most frightful epoch before the end of the world, characterised by indifference to the Faith and outward prosperity...

"Laodicea, which is now called 'Exi-Hissar' by the Turks, that is, old fortress, is in Phrygia, by the river Lyka and near the city of Colossae. In antiquity it was famous for it trade, the fertility of its soil and its cattle-breeding. Its population was very large and wealthy, as is witnessed by the excavations, which revealed many precious pieces of sculpture, fragments of luxurious marble decorations, cornices, pedestals, etc. We may suppose that it was its wealth that made Laodicea so lukewarm to the Christian faith, for which the city was subjected to the wrath of God - its complete destruction and devastation by the Turks (in 1009)." (Archbishop Averky)

Thus saith the Amen. "The use of this epithet contains in itself a threat, or, at least, a warning, that the Laodiceans should not err with regard to the justice of what will be said later: all this is said by Him Who is the purest truth, unfailing faithfulness."[110]

St. Justin the Martyr writes: "I shall give you another testimony from the Scriptures, that God begat before all creatures a Beginning,… Who is called by

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[109] Tikhomirov, *The Teaching of the Apocalypse on the Destinies and the End of the World*, Sergiev Posad: "Khristianin", 1907, N 9 (in Russian).
[110] Lopukhin, op. cit.

the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos… For He can be called by all those names, since He ministers to the Father's will… The Word of Wisdom, Who is Himself this God begotten of the Father of all things, and Word, and Wisdom, and Power, and the Glory of the Begetter, will bear evidence to me, when He speaks by Solomon: **The Lord made Me the Beginning of His ways for His works. He established Me before the age, in the beginning before He made the earth** [Proverbs 8.22,23]."[111]

St. Ambrose of Milan writes: "The Son of God has no beginning, seeing that He already was at the beginning, nor shall He come to an end, Who is **the Beginning and the End** of the Universe; for begin the Beginning, how could He take and receive that which He already had, or how shall He come to an end, being Himself the End of all things, so that in that End we have an abiding-place without end? The divine Generation is not an event occurring in the course of time, and within its limits, and therefore before it time is not, and in it time has no place."[112]

"The Lord is called **the beginning of the creation of God** not, of course, in the sense that He is the first creation of God, but in the sense that **all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made** (John 1.3), and likewise in the sense that He is the recreation of fallen man (Galatians 6.15; Colossians 3.10,1.15,1.18)." (Archbishop Averky)

3.15-16. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wast cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth.

"You are neither fervent in faith, nor entirely unbelieving. But, if you were still unbelieving, you would still have the hope of conversion, whereas now, in that you do not do the will of the Lord which you know, you shall be cast forth from the bosom of My Church." (The Venerable Bede)

Laodicea's water supplies contained large calcium impurities, which can be seen to this day. If someone drank the lukewarm water it would make him vomit.[113]

The Lord does not say a single good word about the Laodicean Church, but reproaches her particularly for her lack of zeal for the faith and tolerance of evil. As we have seen, Hieromartyr Bishop Damascene of Glukhov identifies her with the apostate Soviet church, the Moscow Patriarchate. Without basically disagreeing with this interpretation, we may nevertheless give the Laodicean church a wider denotation, encompassing all the so-called

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[111] St. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 61. In Eerdmans, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, I: 227, 228.
[112] St. Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith*, book IV, ch. 9 (108). In Eerdmans, *Nicene Fathers*, second series, X:276.
[113] Clack, op. cit., p. 149.

Orthodox churches of the last times, whose distinguishing feature is their indifference to all questions of faith, as witnessed by their participation in "the heresy of heresies", Ecumenism.

Ecumenism is the heresy that there is no such thing as heresy as the apostles and fathers of the Church understand that term - that is, a false teaching on a matter of faith that estranges those who adhere to it from the unity of the Church. Ecumenism is the heresy that there is no single faith, whether Orthodox, Papist or Protestant, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim or pagan, which expresses the fullness of the truth, and that all existing faiths (except Ecumenism itself) are more or less in error. It implies that the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church has foundered on the reef of sectarian strife, and that She has to be re-founded on the sands of doctrinal compromise and indifference to the truth. It is the tower of Babel rebuilt, a babble of conflicting tongues united only in their insistence that they all speak the same language.

The dominant characteristic of Ecumenism is *lukewarmness*. Rejecting any sharp distinction between truth and falsehood, Ecumenism accepts all churches and faiths, however incompatible with each other, as being simultaneously true. Hence the search for truth is replaced by the search for unity - only not unity truth, but unity in indifference to truth.

However, "in relation to the faith the middle course has no value. For we may hope that he who is cold, and has no hot water, will one day receive it. But he who burned in spirit through Holy Baptism, but then grew cold, removes from himself the hope of salvation." (St. John of Kronstadt). For "the cold man, who has not known faith, can more easily believe and become a fervent believer than a cooled-off Christian who has become indifferent to the Faith. Even an open sinner is better than a lukewarm Pharisee who is satisfied with his moral condition. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ reproached the Pharisees, preferring to them the repentant publican and harlots. Open and evident sinners can more easily come to an awareness of their own sinfulness and to true repentance than people with a lukewarm conscience who do not acknowledge their moral infirmities." (Archbishop Averky)

Ecumenism is spiritually akin to Communism. Both movements aim at the construction of a materialist paradise on earth through the destruction of traditional forms of ecclesiastical and political life; and both achieved institutional status at about the same time - the years 1917-19. Together, they constitute the third stage in the process of **apostasy** referred to by St. Paul after the first stage - Papism and the second stage - Protestantism.

"The ideologue of Ecumenism," writes Archbishop Averky, "which is the natural consequence of the nostalgia of the Protestant world for the Church that they have lost, was the German pastor Christoph Blumhardt, whom the Protestants call for that reason 'the great prophet of the contemporary world'. He called all the Protestants to unity for 'the construction of the Kingdom of

God on earth', but he died before the organisation of the Ecumenical movement, in 1919. His fundamental idea consisted of the proposition that 'the old world has been destroyed, and a new one is rising on its ruins'. He placed three problems before Christianity: 1) the realisation of the best social structure, 2) the overcoming of confessional disagreements and 3) the working together for the education of the whole world community of nations with the complete liquidation of war.

"It was in these three points that the aims of Ecumenism were formulated by the present general secretary of the Council of the Ecumenical movement, Visser-t-Hooft, who saw the means for their realisation in the Church's pursuit of social aims. For this it is first of all necessary to overcome confessional differences and create one church. The renewed one church will have the possibility of preparing the way for the triumph of Socialism, which will lead to the creation of one world State as the Kingdom of God on earth...."[114]

"Since the fall of Orthodox Russia," continues Averky, "**he who restrains** (II Thessalonians 2.7) has been no more, as was frequently prophesied by the luminary Theophanes [the Recluse] and by our great all-Russian righteous one, Fr. John of Kronstadt, and by many other Spirit-bearing prophets of our time, - and everything in the world has tottered, as if shaken to its very foundations. The spirit of **apostasy** has begun to proclaim itself with unusual cynicism and shamelessness everywhere in the world in all spheres of personal, family, social and state life, as never before. Whole millions of people, formerly Christian by birth, are not ashamed now openly and in the hearing of all to declare their unbelief and godlessness, and state power officially registers them as not belonging to any confession of faith; immorality has reached frightening proportions, in most cases dissoluteness and pornography are not only not prosecuted, but are even cultivated by the powers that be, right to the systematic corruption of the younger generation in schools; the former concepts of duty, honour, nobility and conscience have almost disappeared - and in their place have appeared coarse greed, purely egoistical calculation, material benefits and fleshly pleasures. Particularly bitter is this for contemporary youth, which is almost completely deprived of spiritual zeal and that lofty enthusiasm for sacrificial service to neighbours and attraction to high moral ideas that characterised youth in former times. For many the aim of life has become only career ambitions and work with material guarantees, external comfort and base carnal delights. And there is an unbelievable increase in child crime, which the newspapers constantly talk about, inspiring us with the most serious anxieties concerning the near future.

"In one word, *the world*, terrible to say, *the Christian world now presents a dismal, joyless picture of the deepest religious-moral fall.*

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[114] Averky, "On the situation of the Orthodox Christian in the Contemporary World", op. cit.

"And at the same time, in such sharp contrast with all this dismal reality, more and more often and more and more insistently there sound the repeated calls to peace and union.

"Can one believe, in these circumstances and seeing all that is happening, in the sincerity and, most importantly, in the good intentions of these appeals?

"These appeals go out: in the East - from the God-fighting Soviet power, which has drowned our Homeland in blood, and from its obedient tool, the Moscow Patriarchate, which has thoroughly deserved its name of the 'Soviet church' (what a terrible combination of words!); in the West - from papal Rome, which has compromised itself in history by its evil and antichristian politics of enslavement of those who think otherwise, and from the Protestant world, which is guilty of the religious chaos which distinguishes the present seemingly Christian world that has descended into complete godlessness.

"With the aim of propagandising this 'peace' and 'unity', the representatives of the God-fighting power and its obedient servants in cassock go round the whole world sowing the seeds of lies and trying to deceive and lead into error naive and trusting people. It was with this aim that the papal throne created the so-called 'Eastern Rite' so as to lead into error the Orthodox who do not know their faith well, and now it has even called an 'Ecumenical Council', in which all the so-called 'separated brethren' will be able to take part, although at the same time the encyclical published by the pope leaves no doubt as to the real aim of this 'council' - the unconditional submission of all to papal power. Nor is the Protestant world uninvolved in this striving for 'peace' and 'unity' - that world which has itself unceasingly created so many divisions, in the form of a great quantity of sects, and which is now propagandising its own 'ecumenical' movement, into the nets of which it is trying, not without success, to draw the Orthodox, mainly those who have been infected by the corrupting spirit of 'living-churchmanship' and 'renovationism'.

"How should the Orthodox relate to all this?

"Must he strive towards every kind of peace and unity?

"Is every kind of peace and unity bound to be valuable in his eyes, dear and near to his True Christian soul?

"*Not at all* - was the decisive reply to this question - a question of Christian conscience - of the great ecumenical teacher and hierarch, the pillar of our Orthodox faith, St. Gregory the Theologian. '*It is not fitting,*' he said, '*to treasure every kind of peace, for there is a good disagreement, and the most destructive unanimity, and one must love only a good peace, which has a good aim and unites with God*' (Word 6, vol. 1, p. 192).

"Dearest of all for a Christian is *the Truth*, to witness to which the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, as He Himself said to Pilate (John 18.37). And for the true Christian only one union can be desirable - *union in Christian truth* - the undistorted, unperverted, pure truth, without any admixture of demonic lies, unpoisoned by any kind of compromise with it. From this point of view, all these appeals to 'peace' and 'unity' are unacceptable for the Christian, for they proceed from people who have encroached on our main treasure - the pure and undefiled truth of the teaching of Christ which has been preserved by us in holiness, and who want to substitute for it a lie, which is of the devil. The unity which has been thought up now by the enemies of Christ's pure truth is not a unity in Christ. It is that unity which the Antichrist is striving to create for himself in his desire to subdue all people to himself and found his own kingdom on earth.

"*All that is taking place now on the summits of the religious, state and social life of men since our Orthodox Russia was cast into the dust is nothing other than intense work on the preparation of the future kingdom of the Antichrist by his servants.*"[115]

"The religious-moral fall of bishops," writes Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava, "is... one of the most characteristic signs of the last times. Especially terrible is the fall of bishops when they fall away from the dogmas of the faith, or, as the apostle puts it, **want to pervert the Gospel of Christ** (Galatians 1.7). To such the apostle orders that we say **anathema**: **Whoever will preach to you a Gospel other than that which we preached to you**, he writes, **let him be anathema** (Galatians 1.9). And one must not linger here, he says: **A heretic after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that such a one is perverted, condemning himself** (Titus 3.10-11). Otherwise, that is, for indifference to apostasy from the truth, you may be struck by the wrath of God: **because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth.**"[116]

3.17-18. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness not appear; and anointing thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.

"**Gold tried in the fire** signifies the word of teaching of the holy Fathers of the Church, and **white raiment -** the intercession of the Mother of God and the holy God-pleasers." (St. John of Kronstadt)

"If you wish to become rich, I counsel you, with flaming desire and a fervent heart, to acquire from Me, the Enricher, gold cleansed by the fire of

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[115] Averky, "On the situation of the Orthodox Christian in the Contemporary World", op. cit., pp. 22-24.
[116] *The Letters of Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava*, op. cit., p. 29.

temptation. From it you will have in your heart a treasure that cannot be stolen, and you will be clothed in a most bright raiment of virtues, with which you will cover the nakedness of sin." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

St. Cyprian of Carthage writes: "You, then, who are rich and wealthy, buy for yourself from Christ gold tried by fire; that you may be pure gold, with your filth burnt out as if by fire, if you are purged by almsgiving and righteous works. Buy for yourselves white raiment, that you who had been naked according to Adam, and were before frightful and unseemly, may be clothed with the white garment of Christ. And you are a wealthy and rich matron in Christ's Church, anoint your eyes, not with the devil's eye-shadow, but with Christ's eye-salve, that you may be able to attain to see God, by deserving well of God, both by good works and character."[117]

The lukewarm water in the village adjacent to Laodicea is very beneficial to the eyes. Laodicea exported this **eyesalve** to many parts of the world, but the irony was that the Laodicean Christians were spiritually blind. In the same way, the contemporary ecumenists go round the world spreading their lukewarm Gospel, with which they propose to heal the blindness of men, while not seeing their own utter blindness.[118]

"To **anoint the eyes with eyesalve** is to gain an understanding of holy Scripture by the performance of a good work." (The Venerable Bede)

Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow says: "Remove the blindness of crude sensuality. Anoint the eyes of your mind with the subtle ointment of faith in the spiritual and the Divine. Then you will see in truth."[119]

"**Eyesalve** is the virtue of non-acquisitiveness, which opens men's eyes to the vanity and emptiness of all the wealth of the corruptible world." (Archbishop Averky)

The main impulse towards ecumenism has come from the materially rich but spiritually starved countries of the West. The Lord here counsels Western Christians, and those Orthodox who have become westerners in faith and life, to acquire the spiritual wealth of the Orthodox East - that **gold** which has been tried in the fire of great suffering. **For He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap; and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness** (Malachi 3.2-3).

"From these reproaches of the Laodicean Church leaders it is clear that the indifference of pastors will be the final phenomenon of Church life combined

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[117] St. Cyprian, *On Works and Almsgiving*, 14. Translated in Jurgens, op. cit.
[118] Clack, op. cit., p. 149.
[119] Metropolitan Philaret, *Sermons and Speeches*, vol. 3, Moscow, 1877, p. 233 (in Russian); cited by Marchevsky, op. cit., p. 89.

with an extraordinary development of their material security. Such a phenomenon will appear: a church without the grace of the Holy Spirit, and pastors feeding themselves, and sermons as mere sounds." (St. John of Kronstadt)

3.19. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore and repent.

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of His correction; for whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth (Proverbs 3.11-12).

Zeal is precisely the virtue that ecumenism works to destroy: zeal to struggle for **the faith once delivered to the saints** (Jude 3), zeal to rebuke all false teachings and extinguish sin. Zeal is that fiery quality akin to love which the Lord so longed to send upon the earth (Luke 12.49). According to St. Gregory the Theologian, zeal is the gift that was given to the disciples in tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost.[120]

Archbishop Averky writes: "The most important thing in Christianity, according to the clear teaching of the Word of God, is *the fire of Divine zeal*, zeal for God and His glory, that *Holy Zeal* which alone is able to inspire a man to labours and exploits pleasing to God, without which there is no authentic spiritual life - nor can there be any true Christianity. Without this holy zeal Christians are only Christians by name."[121]

St. Theophan the Recluse writes: "There will be a part that holds the true faith as it was passed down by the Holy Apostles and is preserved in the Orthodox Church, but even of these a not inconsiderable part will be Orthodox only by name, but in their hearts they will not have that order that is demanded by faith, but they will love the present age. Although the name of 'Christian' will be heard everywhere, and everywhere there will be seen churches and church orders, all this will be only appearance, while within there will be complete apostasy. On this soil the kingdom of the Antichrist will be born – and it will grow in the same spirit of appearance."[122]

3.20. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.

"Not by compulsion, He says, is My presence; for I knock at the door of the heart and rejoice with those who open to their salvation. This salvation I consider food and supper, and I eat what they eat, and thus they banish the

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[120] St. Gregory, *On Pentecost*, 12.
[121] Archbishop Averky, "Holy Zeal", St. Elias Publications, Forestville, California.
[122] St. Theophan the Recluse, *Interpretation of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians.*

famine of hearing the word of the Lord (Amos 8.11) and the darkness of errors." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

I have meat to eat that ye know not of... My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work (John 4.32,34). The **meat** which the Lord ate on this occasion was the salvation of the Samaritan woman, to whom He said, in very unecumenical fashion: **Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews** (John 4.22). Ecumenism destroys the very concept of missionary conversion; for if all faiths are true and salvific, what is the point of converting from one to another? But in reality, as St. Cyprian says, "God is one, and Christ is one; His Church is one, and the Faith is one; and the cement of fellowship binds all the people into the body's solid unity. That unity cannot be broken..."[123]

3.21-22. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father on His throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

"**To him that overcometh** is given the promise that he will sit on the throne of God, by which is to be understood the highest dignity of an heir of the Kingdom of heaven, and who reigns together with Christ Himself, the Conqueror of the devil (cf. Matthew 19.28; Luke 22.30)." (Archbishop Averky)

"By **sitting with Him** He means, being a partner in power and judgement. **Who has made us sit together**, he says, **in heavenly places in Christ**. The Lord, as a Conqueror, sat down with the Father on the throne, in that, after the conflict of the passion, after the victory of His resurrection, He manifested Himself more clearly to all, as coequal with the Father in power." (The Venerable Bede)

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches. This exhortation is repeated at the end of the message to each of the Churches. For, as Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava writes, "the people of this age live by faith in progress and soothe themselves with unrealisable dreams. Stubbornly and with a certain ferocity they drive away from themselves the very thought of the end of the world and the coming of the Antichrist. Their eyes are spiritually blinded. **Seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear.** But the meaning of contemporary events is not hidden from the true children of God. Nay more: to him on whom the good will of God rests will be revealed exactly both the time of the coming of the Antichrist and the end of the world. When the Lord will pronounce His threatening judgement on the sinful world**: My Spirit will not remain among men, seeing they are flesh**, then He will say to His faithful servants: **Come out from among them and separate yourselves and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you** (II Corinthians 6.17; cf. Isaiah 52.11). And He will hide them from the

[123] St. Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, 23. Translated by Maurice Benevot, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971.

gaze of the world as they sigh in fear at the woes that are to come. Therefore great is the merit of those who remind the people of this age of the great times and events that are to come."[124]

"The judgements of God were accomplished often even in the most ancient times. We have reports and prophecies about them in Holy Scripture. Such, for example, was God's decree on the extermination of the human race by the universal flood. Noah was called to take part in the judgement, for God discussed with him the fact that the earth was filled with evil deeds, and revealed His intentions to Noah. Abraham was called to take part in the judgement of God on Sodom and the neighbouring cities, and he became an intercessor for the granting of clemency to the cities for the sake of the righteous – few though they were – that dwelt in their midst.

"The judgement on Jerusalem and the temple was announced by Jesus Christ in the very temple before the disciples and the people (Matthew 23.30). The prophecy on the judgement on the world was pronounced by the Lord from the Mount of Olives in the closest presence of four of the disciples (Matthew 24). Moreover, as a comparison for the events at the end of the world that are awaiting the world, there was cited the final destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple that was about to come in the same generation for their rejection of the salvation offered them that had been acquired at the price of the redemptive merits of Christ.

"As we follow the events of universal history, we see the judgement of God on the madness of Nimrod and his contemporaries, who dreamed of glorifying themselves on earth through the building of a tower to the heavens. The judgement of God on the Amorites and other descendants of Canaan is evident in the conversation of God with Abraham already 400 years before its accomplishment. Then there was the judgement of God on Egypt for its enslavement and oppression of the chosen people – Moses and Aaron were participants in, and executors of, this judgement. The judgements of God were often revealed on the chosen people during the time of the Judges, when the people forgot God. The executors of the judgements of God were the neighbouring peoples.

"The judgement of God in the division between the Israelite and Judaean kingdoms, the deprivation, first of the one, and then of the other of their independence, first the carrying away of the ten tribes into Assyrian captivity, and then the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar and the seventy-year captivity in Babylon – these judgements of God were carried out with the direct participation of the holy Prophets of God and touched not only the chosen people, but also other peoples who had some

[124] Archbishop Theophanes, in foreword to Sergius Nilus, *On the Bank of God's River*, Sergiev Posad: Holy Trinity - St. Sergius Lavra, 1916 (in Russian).

relationship to the chosen people. The prophetic books in general, and the prophetic book of Daniel in particular, abound in revelations on the judgements of God on the kings and kingdoms of the historical world." (St. John of Kronstadt)

II. THE SECOND VISION: THE CHURCH AT THE END OF TIME

1. The Twenty-Four Elders and the Four Living Creatures

"After describing the works of the Church and its future condition, he recapitulates from the birth of Christ, with the intention of repeating the same things in a different manner, for in this book he repeats under various figures the whole period of the Church's history." (The Venerable Bede)

In a second vision, the seer's spiritual eye is turned from earth to heaven, from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant:-

4.1. After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said: Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.

"The fourth chapter contains the beginning of a new, a second vision. The depiction of a new and magnificent spectacle which opens before the gaze of St. John begins with a commandment to him to ascend through an open door in heaven so as to see **things which must be hereafter**. The opening of the door signifies the revelation of the hidden mysteries of the Spirit. By the words **Come hither**, the hearer is commanded to put off entirely earthly thinking and be converted to heavenly thinking." (Archbishop Averky)

4.2-3. And immediately I was in the Spirit: and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He that sat was to look upon like a jaspar and a sardine stone; and there was a rainbow about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

"The **throne** is the rest of God in the saints." (Patriarch Anthimus)

"**And immediately I was in the Spirit**: that is, again in a state of ecstasy. This time St. John saw God the Father Himself sitting upon a throne. His appearance was like the precious stone jaspar (a stone of the colour green like emerald) and a sardine stone (sard, of a fiery colour). The first of these colours, green, according to the commentary of St. Andrew of Caesarea, signifies that the Divine nature is ever flourishing, life-bearing, and nourishing. The second, the fiery yellow red, indicates purity and sanctity, which ever remain in God, and His threatening anger towards those who transgress His will. The union of these two colours indicates that God chastises sinners, but at the same time is always ready to forgive one who sincerely repents. The apparition of the One sitting on the throne was surrounded by a rainbow like an emerald, a stone of green colour which signifies, as does also the rainbow which appeared after the flood, the eternal mercy of God towards mankind.

"The sitting on the throne itself signifies the opening of the judgement of God which is to be revealed in the last times. This is not yet the terrible Last Judgement, but a preparatory judgement like those judgements of God which have occurred many times in the history of mankind to people who have

sinned. (For example, the universal flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha, the destruction of Jerusalem, and many others.)

"The precious stones jaspar and sardine, and likewise the rainbow around the throne, being a symbol of the ceasing of the wrath of God and the renewal of the world, signify that the judgement of god upon the world, that is, its fiery destruction, is to end with its renewal. This is especially indicated also by the quality of jaspar to heal wounds received by the sword." (Archbishop Averky)

"That sea was an image of the mystery of Holy Baptism. Because between the Throne of God and the man who desires to approach God's Throne, there interposes the water of Baptism, and no one can in any way approach God seated on His Throne in the highest unless he first traverse the sea of Baptism, as say the Scriptures: **Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God** (John 3.5). For what reason is it that the sea, which images forth the mystery of Baptism, is of glass and crystal? We should know that the commentators on the Divine Scriptures say that it is like glass in a purity that cleanses the souls of those being baptized, and like crystal on account of its strength which makes steadfast the heart; furthermore it is for this reason that it is of glass and crystal because just as the sun's rays pass through glass and crystal, the Grace of God, as it were, penetrates the mystery of Baptism, and thereby comes to the person and illumines the temple of his soul. We can also say, that it is not in vain that the sea before the Throne of God, which represents the mystery of Baptism, is of glass and crystal, for the Most Holy Trinity seated upon His Throne, as it were upon a mirror of glass and crystal, will be revealed and seen therein, for in Holy Baptism the image of the Trinity is revealed… Let us say, that the sea before the Throne of God is an image of the mystery of Holy Baptism, wherein our nature is baptized, and like glass our soul is cleansed **from all filthiness of flesh and spirit** (II Corinthians 7.1) and like crystal it is strengthened and illumined. And it is when God in Trinity looks upon this mystical glass and crystal during our Baptism, then in truth the Trinitarian image is reflected therein."[125]

"The opening of a door in heaven and the appearance of the throne signify the beginning of God's judgement, which must take place in the last ages in successive periods, some long, some short, in accordance with their proximity to the limit, beyond which there are no more limits, no more ages, but one uninterrupted, endless present. The end of that which is temporal and the transfer to that which is eternal will take place on earth during the exceptional circumstances of a rebellion of the earthborn against their Creator. Such a rebellion, led and inspired by Satan, has been prepared by him from long ago. The mystery of the planned iniquity is always ready to be accomplished, but it has been held back, and up to now continues to be held back, by the piety of

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[125] *1984 Trinity Russian Orthodox Calendar*, Jordanville; translated by Valentina B. Vinokourova, in *The Shepherd*, vol. XIX, no. 5, January, 1999, p. 6.

the zealots of the glory of God. Such in antiquity were the holy prophets and apostles of the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world for the salvation of many. These pious zealots for the glory of God have struggled to arouse, through fear of God's judgement, the people who have been enticed by Satan into starting a rebellion against the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. They were and are successful, with the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit, in putting off the explosion of the rebellion for whole centuries, until the preordained number of those saved from the foundation of the world have entered the Kingdom of God. The end can only come when everything that could have been drawn out for the heavenly granary will have been drawn out. When only chaff remain, then will the time of recompense come near. Long before that the judgement will begin in heaven - but not that final judgement which will be revealed on earth at the resurrection from the dead. That last judgement will be the end or conclusion of the present judgement, that is, it will be the declaration of the final and irrevocable lot of all those under judgement. And those under judgement will not be only the evil, but also the good, for all have sinned. And the righteous, for their striving to follow the path of the Gospel, will be justified, while the evil, who did not follow the instructions of Gospel charity, will be condemned to eternal deprivation of light and blessedness, which will be the fiery torment that has no end. But here, in Revelation, reference is made to the preliminary judgement of God on the world which began long before the last day; for the rebellion has been prepared from long ago by various satanic intrigues aimed at the destruction of the saving ark of the Holy Church, in which all those seeking deliverance from the flood of sin find reliable salvation...

"There are innumerable revelations of the judgement of God both in the public and in the private spheres, only we do not always - or rather, we almost never - understand these judgements of God; or we understand so later that it remains only to be eternally sorry for one's own and people's ignorance of how one should act so as not to be subjected to the righteous judgement of God.

"As regards the preliminary judgement of the world, that is revealed at the end of time, and lo!, the seer is counted worthy of a revelations concerning this and announces: **a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.** Who is this? Since here, in contrast to the previous vision of the Son of God, there is no indication of any human sign, it is undoubtedly the Father, from Whom is everything." (St. John of Kronstadt)

4.4. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

The twenty-four elders are reminiscent of the twenty-four divisions of the sons of Aaron for the priestly services in the Temple (I Chronicles 24.1-18).

Archbishop Averky writes: "There are the most varied opinions and suppositions as to whom one must understand by these elders. One thing is certain: that these are representatives of humanity who have pleased the Lord. Many suppose, basing themselves on the promise given to the holy apostles: **Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel** (Matthew 19.28), that by these twenty-four elders one must understand twelve representatives of Old Testament humanity - the holy patriarchs and prophets - and twelve representatives of New Testament humanity - namely, the twelve apostles of Christ. The white garments are a symbol of purity and eternal feasting, and the golden crowns are a sign of victory over demons."

4.5. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices.

"This indicates how frightful and terrible God is for impenitent sinners who are unworthy of His mercy and forgiveness. (Compare the manifestation of God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 9.16).)" (Archbishop Averky)

"But for those worthy of salvation, the lightnings and thunderings do not cause fear, but sweetness and enlightenment: the one enlightens their spiritual eyes, while the other gives pleasure to the hearing." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

4.5. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.

"By these seven spirits one must understand either the seven chief angels, as St. Irenaeus interprets it, or the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which are enumerated by the holy Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 11.2)." (Archbishop Averky)

"Just as earlier, in 1.4, John gave a blessing to the Churches from the Holy Spirit under the name of seven spirits under the altar of the Father, so it is evident that the reference here is to the Person of the Holy Spirit under the form of seven lamps of fire." (St. John of Kronstadt)

4.6. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal.

"The crystal sea, being immobile and still, as opposed to the stormy sea seen later by St. John (13.1), must signify, in the opinion of many interpreters, 'the multitude of the holy heavenly powers', pure and immortal as they are (St. Andrew of Caesarea). These are the souls of men who have not been disturbed by the storms of the sea of life, but like crystal reflect the seven colours of the rainbow, being penetrated by the seven gifts of the Grace of the Holy Spirit." (Archbishop Averky)

"We may suppose that these are the souls of human beings from the other world. They are not disturbed by worldly storms, but like crystal, which reflects the seven colours of the rainbow, they are penetrated by the seven gifts of the grace of the Holy Spirit. Thus the assembly of these blessed spirits

could be represented by a glass sea, like crystal, before the throne of the Judge, Whom they are called to attend." (St. John of Kronstadt)

4.6-8. And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. And the first living creature was like a lion, and the second living creature like a calf, and the third living creature had a face as a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures each had six wings about him; and these were full of eyes within: and they rest neither day nor night, saying: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was, and is, and is to come.

"These are the powers by which the world is sustained and whom Isaiah also saw around the throne. Their being **full of eyes before and behind** signifies their cherubic knowledge of the past and future, and their **six wings** - their seraphic readiness to carry out the Divine commands of the Holy Trinity. These are the angelic beings that are the highest and closest to the throne of God.

"But these powers serve as a footstool for the throne of God, and for that reason it is said: **in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four living creatures**. This means that their faces are turned towards the four corners of the world: the north, the south, the east and the west, while their backs as it were support the throne of the Almighty, Who contains everything and everyone.

"As regards the difference in the external appearance of the four living creatures, this corresponds to the service of Christ God Himself in the economy of our salvation: His royal service - as commander of the forces of nature and the demons; His high-priestly service - as offering a sacrifice for the whole world and being Himself offered in sacrifice; His prophetic service - as God's teacher and evangelist; and human service - as assuming the nature of our race, for our salvation. To the first corresponds the emblematic representation of a lion; to the second - of a calf; to the third - of an eagle; and to the fourth - of a man." (St. John of Kronstadt)

"Some think that these living creatures should be understood to be the four elements and God's governance and preservation of them, or God's dominion over the regions of heaven, earth, sea and the underworld. However, as is clear from the further description of the appearance of these living creatures, without doubt they are the very angelic powers who in the mystical vision of the holy Prophet Ezekiel on the river Chobar (1.5-25) supported the mystical chariot on which the Lord God sits as King.

"These four living creatures are as it were emblems of the four evangelists. The multitude of their eyes indicates the Divine omniscience, the knowledge of everything past, present and future. These are the highest angelic beings,

the closest to God, who ceaselessly glorify Him (cf. Isaiah 6.2-3)." (Archbishop Averky)

According to St. Andrew of Caesarea, the four living creatures signify "the four chief virtues and the four Gospels. The **lion**, as the symbol of courage, signifies the Gospel of John, for he, says Irenaeus, in describing His pre-eternal Kingdom, announced that **in the beginning was the Word** (John 1.1); the **calf**, as the symbol of righteousness, signifies the Gospel of Luke, who announced the lawful and priestly genealogy of Christ; the **eagle**, as the symbol of moderation, signifies the Gospel of Mark, as being the shortest and beginning in a prophetic spirit; the **man**, as the symbol of wisdom, signifies the Gospel of Matthew, which began its account of the birth of Christ according to nature, but not according to the law. These symbols probably also signify the economy of Christ: the **lion** as King, the **calf** as Chief Priest - or rather, Sacrifice, the **man** as incarnate for our sake, and the **eagle** as giver of the Life-giving Spirit Who descends on us from above."

"St. Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd century) was the first to identify the four living creatures with the four Evangelists. According to early Orthodox icons (for example, the mosaics in the basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna) the lion is identified with St. Mark, the calf with St. Luke, the man with St. Matthew, and the eagle with St. John."[126]

St. Athanasius the Great writes: "The Triad, praised, reverenced and adored, is one and indivisible and without degrees. It is united without confusion, just as the Monad also is distinguished without separation. For the fact of these venerable living creatures offering their praises three times, saying **Holy, Holy, Holy**, proves that the Three Persons are perfect; just as by saying **Lord** they declare the One Essence."[127]

St. Gregory of Nyssa writes: "The mystery of the Trinity was luminously proclaimed when they uttered that marvellous cry, **Holy**, being awestruck with the beauty in each Hypostasis of the Trinity."[128]

St. Ambrose writes: "They repeat thrice and say the same word, that even in a hymn you may understand the distinction of Persons in the Trinity, and the oneness of the Godhead, and while they say this they proclaim God."[129]

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[126] Rose, op. cit., p. 112, note. Holy Apostles Convent writes: "Although the early Church Fathers generally agree that the four living creatures symbolized the Evangelists, there was a diversity of opinion about which creature represented which Gospel writer. Saint Irenaeos thought that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were prefigured by the man, the eagle, the calf, and the lion respectively [*Adv. Haer.* 3, 11, 8 (*SC* 211:160, 175-170, 236).] Blessed Jerome and St. Gregory the Dialogist prefer the order of man, lion, calf, and eagle. The Venerable Bede consistently followed the order lion, man, calf, eagle [*In Apocalypsin* (*P.L.* 93:144A-B; *In Lucam* (*CCSL* 120: 6, 68-10, 22).]" (*The Orthodox New Testament*, volume 2, Buena Vista, CO, 1999, p. 559).

[127] St. Athanasius, *On Luke 10.22*, 6.

[128] St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, book I. In Eerdmans, *Nicene Fathers*, second series, V:64.

"**They rest neither day nor night, saying: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty,** as if to say: they ceased not from singing all the time. For the greatest and only rest of the saints is with unwearied voice to sing in heaven the praises of the Most High Trinity, which is God. But in a deeper sense God can be understood to have rested from His works… in that for the sake of His goodness alone He made works capable of resting in Himself… God, Who before the creation had perfect rest in Himself eternally, Himself also rested after the creation of the world… inasmuch as He supplies rest for the rational creatures." (The Venerable Bede).[130]

4.9-11. And when these living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him that sits on the throne, Who liveth unto the ages of ages, the four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sits on the throne, and worship Him that lives unto the ages of ages, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they exist and were created.

"**The four and twenty elders**: These words signify that the elders are participants in the hymns of the heavenly powers and confess that they received from God the power to win the victory over spiritual enemies." (Archbishop Averky)

This chapter places the emphasis on God as Creator and Preserver of the whole of creation: the next chapter places the emphasis on Him as Redeemer and Saviour of the world.

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[129] St. Ambrose of Milan, *Of the Holy Spirit*, vook III, ch. 16 (110). In Eerdmans, *Nicene Fathers*, second series, X: 151.
[130] St. Bede, *On Genesis* 2.2.

2. The Lamb of God

5.1-4. And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back side, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice: who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no one in heaven, nor in earth, nor under the earth was able to open the book, nor to look thereon. And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the book, nor to look thereon.

"Here **the right hand** signifies Him Who sits at the right hand of the Father and Who will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. This **book** is Wisdom incarnate. The **seven seals** are the same as the **seven lamps of fire**. They signify the Divine memory, the source of wisdom, sealed with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. In accordance with this book the righteous judgement of God must be accomplished in the definite sequence of the seven periods of time. But who understands the mind of God, and to whom is opened that which is sealed in the memory of the Pre-Eternal One?" (St. John of Kronstadt)

In Thy book shall all men be written (Psalm 138.15).

The Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven (Hebrews 12.23).

"The Lord Almighty Whom St. John has seen sitting on the throne holds in His hand a book written on the outside and inside and sealed with seven seals. Books in antiquity consisted of pieces of parchment rolled up in a roll or placed on a round stick, and the whole thing was bound on the outside and sealed by a seal. Sometimes the book consisted of a piece of parchment which was folded in the form of a fan and tied from above with a string, being sealed with seals on each bend or fold of the book. In that case the opening of one seal gave one the opportunity of opening and reading only one part of the book. The writing was usually made only on the inner side of the parchment, but in rare cases both sides were written on. According to the explanation of St. Andrew of Caesarea and other commentators, by the book which St. John one must understand 'the most wise memory of God', in which are registered all things, and likewise 'the depths of the decrees of God'. In this book, therefore, were registered all the mystical decrees of the most wise providence of god concerning the salvation of men.

"The seven seals signify either the complete confirmation which is known to no one, or the economy of Him Who searches the depth of the Divine Spirit, something which can be unsealed by no created being. The book is also to be understood as the prophecies concerning which Christ Himself said that in part they were fulfilled in the Gospel (Luke 24.44), but that the others would be fulfilled in the last days.

"One of the mighty angels with a loud voice cries out that someone should open this book, taking off its seven seals. But no one was found worthy, neither in heaven, nor on earth, nor under the earth, who would dare to do this. This signifies that the knowledge of the mysteries of God is accessible to no created being. This inaccessibility is made still greater by the expression **nor to look thereon**, that is, even to look at it." (Archbishop Averky)

And all these things shall be to you as the words of this sealed book (Isaiah 29.11-12).

St. Jerome writes: "How many there are today who fancy themselves as being learned, yet the Scriptures are a sealed book to them, and one which they cannot open save through Him Who has **the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth** (3.7)."[131]

5.5-6. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as if it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

St. Hippolytus writes: "Now, as our Lord Jesus Christ Who is also God was prophesied under the figure of a lion [Genesis 49.9], on account of His royalty and glory, in the same way have the Scriptures also aforetime spoken of antichrist as a lion, on account of his tyranny and violence. For the deceiver seeks to liken himself in all things to the Son of God. Christ is a lion, so antichrist is also a lion; Christ is a king, so antichrist is also a king. The Saviour was manifested as a lamb, so he too, in like manner, will appear as a lamb, though within he is a wolf. The Saviour came into the world in the circumcision, and he will come in the same manner. The Lord sent apostles among all nations, and he in like manner will send false apostles. The Saviour gathered together the sheep that were scattered abroad, and he in like manner will bring together a people that is scattered abroad. The Lord gave a seal to those who believed on Him, and he will give one in like manner. The Saviour appeared in the form of man, and he too will come in the form of a man. The Saviour raised up and showed His holy flesh like a temple, and he will raise a temple of stone in Jerusalem."[132]

"The lion signifies here a powerful being, a hero. It refers to the prophecy of the Patriarch Jacob concerning the **lion of the tribe of Judah**, by which is to be understood the Messiah, Christ (Genesis 49.9-10).

"Having looked, the seer of mysteries John beheld **a Lamb as if it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes**. This Lamb, carrying on Himself

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[131] St. Jerome, *Letter 53 to Paulinus*, 5.
[132] St. Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 6. In Eerdmans, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, V:206.

traces of the fact that He had been offered in sacrifice is, of course, **the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world** (John 1.29), that is, our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is shown to be worthy to open the book of God's decrees; for He, having offered Himself as sacrifice for the sins of men, is Himself revealed as the fulfiller of God's decrees for the salvation of the human race. Further, the later opening by Him of the seven seals of the book signifies the very fulfilment of the Divine decrees by the Only-Begotten Son of God as the Saviour of mankind. The seven horns are symbols of His power (Psalm 74.11), and the seven eyes signify, as is immediately explained, **the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth**, that is, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which repose in Christ as the Anointed of God. The Prophet Isaiah already spoke of this (11.2), as did also the holy Prophet Zechariah (chapter 4). The seven eyes symbolise at the same time God's omnipotence. **The Lamb stood in the midst of the throne**, that is, there where the Son of God should be, at the right hand of God the Father." (Archbishop Averky)

5.7-8. And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne. And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints.

"The Lamb... **took the book out of the hand of Him that sat on the throne** (that is, He received the power to judge the living and the dead), for the Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son (John 5.22)." (St. John of Kronstadt)

"The Lamb **took the book out of the hand of Him that sat on the throne** and immediately the four creatures (the seraphim) and the twenty-four elders falling down gave Him Divine worship. The harps which they had in their hands signify the harmonious chanting of their souls. The golden cups filled with incense as is immediately explained, are **the prayers of the saints**." (Archbishop Averky)

For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in those that are saved and in those that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life (II Corinthians 2.15-16).

Protopriest Michael Pomazansky writes: "Life in Christ is a world of prayer. It penetrates the whole body of the Church, unites every member of the Church with the Heavenly Father, the members of the earthly Church with themselves, and the members of the earthly Church with the Heavenly Church. Prayers are the threads of the living fabric of the Church body, for **the prayer of a righteous man availeth much** (James 5.16). The twenty-four elders in heaven at the throne of God fell down before the Lamb, each having

harps and vials filled with incense, **which are the prayers of saints** (5.8); that is, they offered up prayer on earth to the heavenly throne."[133]

5.9-14. And they chanted a new song, saying: Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof; for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God in Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto out God kings and priests; and we shall reign on earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying: Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb unto the ages of ages. And the four living creatures said: Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped Him that liveth unto the ages of ages.

"And they chanted a hymn to the Son of God, the Redeemer of mankind, an authentically **new song** not heard from the creation of the world, concerning which the Psalmist David already prophesied (Psalm 97.1). The **new song** is that which the Holy Spirit teaches those who have been delivered from the oldness of the letter and who are enlightened among all tribes and peoples. Of them he (John) says that they will reign on that earth which the Lord has promised to the meek (Matthew 5.5). In this song the new Kingdom of the Son of God is glorified, that Kingdom in which He reigns as the God-man Who bought it with the high price of His own blood. The redemption of mankind, although it refers only to man, was nevertheless so astonishing, so touching and sacred, that it aroused the most lively participation of the whole choir of heaven, so that all together, angels and men, glorify God for this work and **worshipped Him that liveth unto the ages of ages**." (Archbishop Averky)

Ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in the heavens, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect (Hebrews 12.22-24).

"And lo! when in the world above the glorification of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world was accomplished, in the world below, on earth, began His dethronement by the vain wise men of this age, who see supposed faults of the Divinity in His works, and also faults of righteousness in His most holy Bride - the holy Church, founded by Him on the tradition of the

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[133] Pomazansky, "On the Question of the 'Toll-Houses'", in *Selected Essays*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1996, p. 239.

holy apostles and prophets for the establishment and confirmation of truth and salvation on the sinful earth.

"**Fear and tremble, O heaven, and be ye shaken, ye foundations of the earth!** Earthly wisdom will shake **the pillar and foundation of the truth** and will conquer those who are blind, who until now peacefully entrusted themselves to the leadership of the most holy Bride of the Lamb.

"The victory of apostasy hastens the end of the world. Corresponding measures are undertaken from above, the great judgement is prepared. The Lamb will receive from the Father the power to judge, and in fulfilment of His promise to the holy apostles (Matthew 19.28) makes them and the holy prophets (who announced His Coming) participants in His judgement on the world." (St. John of Kronstadt)

"The four living creatures and the elders together signify the fact that through Christ God, Who has joined together that which was separate and destroyed the middle wall of partition (Ephesians 2.14), a single flesh and a single Church has been formed from angels and men. And, together with the four living creatures who surpass the other orders of angels, the elders also, who signify the fullness of those being saved, are worthy of the song and the worship of God. May we also be vouchsafed this in Christ Himself, the Giver of peace and our God, to Whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit may there be glory, dominion and honour, both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

3. The First Six Seals

6.1. And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four living creatures saying, Come and see.

The noise of thunder signifies judgement; and just as in chapters 4 and 5 we see God as Creator and Redeemer, so now, from chapters 6 to 11, we see Him as Judge.

What judgements do the opening of the seals signify? The answer to this question is contained, at least in part, in a vision that the Procurator of the Russian Holy Synod, Count Alexander Petrovich Tolstoy, had in 1871, and in the interpretation given it by St. Ambrose of Optina. The count wrote to Elder Ambrose: "It was as if I were in my own house standing in the entrance-hall. Beyond was a room in which on the ledge between the windows there was a large icon of the God of Sabaoth that gave out such blinding light that from the other room (the entrance-hall) it was impossible to look at it. Still further in was a room in which there were Protopriest Matthew Alexandrovich Konstantinovsky and the reposed Metropolitan Philaret. And this room was full of books; along the walls from ceiling to floor there were books; on the long tables there were piles of books; and while I certainly had to go into this room, I was held back by fear, and in terror, covering my face with my hand, I passed through the first room and, on entering the next room, I saw Protopriest Matthew Alexandrovich dressed in a simple black cassock; on his head was a skull-cap; in his hands was an unbent book, and he motioned me with his head to find a similar book and open it. At the same time the metropolitan, turning the pages of this books said: 'Rome, Troy, Egypt, Russia, the Bible.' I saw that in my book 'Bible' was written in very heavy lettering. Suddenly there was a noise and I woke up in great fear. I thought a lot about what it could all mean. My dream seemed terrible to me - it would have been better to have seen nothing. Could I not ask those experienced in the spiritual life concerning the meaning of this vision in sleep? But an inner voice explained the dream even to me myself. However, the explanation was so terrible that I did not want to agree with it."

St. Ambrose gave the following interpretation of this vision: "He who was shown this remarkable vision in sleep, and who then heard the very significant words, very probably received the explanation of what he had seen and heard through his guardian angel, since he himself recognized that an inner voice explained the meaning of the dream to him. However, since we have been asked, we also shall give our opinion...

"...The words 'Rome, Troy, Egypt' may have the following signification. Rome at the time of the Nativity of Christ was the capital of the world, and, from the beginning of the patriarchate, had the primacy of honour; but because of love of power and deviation from the truth she was later rejected and humiliated. Ancient Troy and Egypt were notable for the fact that they

were punished for their pride and impiety - the first by destruction, and the second by various punishments and the drowning of Pharaoh with his army in the Red Sea. But in Christian times, in the countries where Troy was located there were founded the Christian patriarchates of Antioch and Constantinople, which flourished for a long time, embellishing the Orthodox Church with their piety and right dogmas; but later, according to the inscrutable destinies of God, they were conquered by barbarians - the Muslims, and up to now have borne this heavy slavery, which restricts the freedom of Christian piety and right belief. And in Egypt, together with the ancient impiety, there was from the first times of Christianity such a flowering of piety that the deserts were populated by tens of thousands of monastics, not to speak of the great numbers of pious laity from whom they came. But then, by reason of moral licentiousness, there followed such an impoverishment of Christian piety in that country that at a certain time in Alexandria the patriarch remained with only one priest.

"... After the three portentous names 'Rome, Troy, Egypt', the name of 'Russia' was also mentioned - Russia, which at the present time is counted as an independent Orthodox state, but where the elements of foreign heterodoxy and impiety have already penetrated and taken root among us and threaten us with the same sufferings as the above-mentioned countries have undergone.

"Then there comes the word 'Bible'. No other state is mentioned. This may signify that *if in Russia, too, because of the disdain of God's commandments and the weakening of the canons and decrees of the Orthodox Church and for other reasons, piety is impoverished, then there must immediately follow the final fulfilment of that which is written at the end of the Bible, in the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian.*

"He who saw this vision correctly observed that the explanation which was given him by an inner voice was terrible. Terrible will be the Second Coming of Christ and terrible the last judgement of the world. But not without terrors will also be the period before that when the Antichrist will reign, as it is said in the Apocalypse: **And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and death shall flee from them** (9.6). *The Antichrist will come during a period of anarchy*, as the apostle says: **until he that restraineth be taken away from the midst** (II Thessalonians 2.7), that is, *when the powers that be no longer exist.*"[134]

St. Ambrose's identification of **him that restraineth** the coming of the Antichrist with the political authorities has long roots in the patristic interpretation of this passage. St. John Chrysostom, Blessed Theophylact and others identified him with the Roman emperor, whose successor, as being the emperor of "the Third Rome", Russia, was the Russian Tsar. Thus Bishop Theophanes the Recluse wrote: "The Tsar's authority, having in its hands the means of restraining the movements of the people and relying on Christian

[134] St. Ambrose of Optina, *Letters*, Sergiev Posad, 1908, part 1, pp. 21-22 (in Russian).

principles itself, does not allow the people to fall away from them, but will restrain it. And since the main work of the Antichrist will be to turn everyone away from Christ, he will not appear as long as the Tsar is in power. The latter's authority will not let him show himself, but will prevent him from acting in his own spirit. That is what **he that restraineth** is. When the Tsar's authority falls, and the peoples everywhere acquire self-government (republics, democracies), then the Antichrist will have room to manoeuvre. It will not be difficult for Satan to train voices urging apostasy from Christ, as experience showed in the time of the French revolution. Nobody will give a powerful 'veto' to this. A humble declaration of faith will not be tolerated. And so, when these arrangements have been made everywhere, arrangements which are favourable to the exposure of antichristian aims, then the Antichrist will also appear. Until that time he waits, and is restrained." (Archbishop Averky)

We may conclude, then, that the period of God's final judgements on the human race, as symbolised by the breaking of the seven seals of judgement, began with the fall of Russia and the removal of **him that restraineth** (II Thessalonians 2.7), the Russian Tsar. The following interpretation, therefore, is based on the tentative hypothesis that the first six seals refer to God's judgements on mankind in the period from 1914, when the Russian Empire began to fall, to 1949, when Communism reached its zenith; while the seventh seal refers to the period of God's judgement on mankind during the period up to and including the Third World War and culminating in the seven-year reign of the Antichrist up to the Second Coming of Christ Himself.

The Lord Jesus Christ pointed to three signs as marking the beginning of the apocalyptic period, **the beginning of sorrows**, as He called it (Matthew 24.8):

1. The Appearance of False Christs. **For many will come in My name and will say: I am Christ, and will deceive many** (Matthew 24.5; 23-27).

2. Wars. **And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom** (Matthew 24.6-7).

3. Natural Catastrophes. **And there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places** (Matthew 24.7).

One contemporary epoch corresponds to these three criteria: the epoch of the First World War and the decades on either side of it.

The appearance of false Christs began in 1893 with the arrival in America of Swami Vivekandra in order to present the religion of Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions. In Russia, too, this was the period in which eastern religions and their westernised offspring, such as Madame Blavatsky's

theosophical movement, made their first appearance in society. It is a characteristic belief of these religions that every man is by nature God and Christ, or can become so by his own efforts. Under the influence of this belief almost all forms of Christianity began to suffer inner disintegration, until, by the end of the twentieth century, it is common to find "Christians" who believe in reincarnation and the natural divinity of man. Increasingly common, too, has been the phenomenon of people claiming in a literal sense to be Christ.

This period was followed by a period of unprecedentedly bloody wars: the First World War, the Russian Civil War, the War between Turkey and Greece, the War waged against the Russian people by Lenin and Stalin.

And this was followed by a period of equally unprecedented natural disasters and famines, especially in Russia. Prince Eugene Troubetskoy, writing in 1918 when the worst of these disasters was yet to come, said: "In mankind inner division is reflected first of all in wars. But wars are not the end, but the beginning of general divisiveness, which must penetrate into all social relations. As the Gospel says: **When ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye be not troubled: for such things must needs be, but the end shall not be yet** (Mark 13.7; Matthew 24.6; Luke 21.9). The Gospel points to other signs of the general collapse of humanity - **famines** and **troubles** (Mark 13.8), **pestilences** (Matthew 24.7). We know that all these phenomena are closely linked with war and constitute its natural consequence. **Troubles** are born from war, because war shakes the whole state mechanism, **famine** - because war and troubles harm the whole economy of the people, and, finally, **pestilences** - because war always serves as the cause of the fiercest epidemics. In the Gospel mention is made of one more phenomenon which serves as a herald of the speedy end of the universe - **earthquakes in places** (Matthew 24.7; Mark 13.8; Luke 21.11). The link between these manifestations of the volcanic forces and the events in the history of humanity in the given case are not obvious and cannot be revealed by scientific analysis: but the mystical link between the phenomena of human collapse and the phenomena of cosmic devastation is quite comprehensible. Since the meaning of universal history is at the same time the meaning of the existence of the planet earth, the end of humanity is at the same time its own end; which is why the coincidence of the catastrophic events of history with **fearful sights** (Luke 21.11) is completely natural."[135]

6.2. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him; and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

The Venerable Bede writes: "Surely the white horse is the Church; the Rider who was commanding it is the Lord; He had a bow because He was

[135] Troubetskoy, op. cit., p. 53.

coming to make war against the powers of the air; and a crown of victory was given to Him because by dying He overthrew the reign of death."[136]

I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass. In the first chariot were red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; and in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grisled and bay horses. Then I answered and said unto the angel that talked with me: What are these, my lord? And the angel answered and said unto me: These are the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth (Zechariah 6.1-5).

The riders on the horses are angels sent by God to deliver His judgements on an apostate world (II Chronicles 6.17).

Now angels on white horses intervened in perhaps the most critical battle in the First World War, the Battle of Mons, in August, 1914. If the Germans had won that battle, it is likely that they would have captured Paris, defeated the British and the French and then been in a position to turn the full strength of their armies on the ill-equipped Russians. But according to eye-witnesses on both sides, a heavenly band of warriors on white horses intervened on the side of the British and routed the Germans, who were terrified by their invulnerability to bullets. Some said that the leader of this band was the Archangel Michael, others - St. George.[137] In any case, the British line held, which indirectly gave the Orthodox Russian Empire another two or three years of life.

6.3-4. And when He had opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say: Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red; and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another; and there was given unto him a great sword.

"The **red horse** is the sign either of the shedding of blood or of the heartfelt zeal of those who suffer for Christ." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

The victories of the Orthodox leaders, who **went forth conquering, and to conquer**, were short-lived and inconclusive. In 1917 came the Bolshevik revolution, symbolized here by the colour red. This was followed by the Russian Civil War of 1918-20 and the peasant revolts of 1921, which involved more bloodshed than any previous war in human history.

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And

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[136] The Venerable Bede, *On the Tabernacle,* I, 4.
[137] "The Angels of Mons", *This England*, Winter, 1982.

many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved (Matthew 24.9-13).

All this took place after the Russian revolution of 1917. Many thousands died for the Faith of Christ, and first of all Tsar Nicholas II and his family. And many **were offended** - that is, fell away from the Faith of Christ, and betrayed their fellow Christians to tortures and death. St. Seraphim of Sarov prophesied: "More than half a century will pass. Then evildoers will raise their heads high. This will happen without fail: the Lord, seeing the impenitent evil of their hearts, will allow their enterprises for a short time. But their sickness will rebound upon their own heads, and the unrighteousness of their destructive plots will fall upon them. The Russian land will become red with rivers of blood... Before the birth of the Antichrist there will be a great, protracted war and a terrible revolution in Russia passing all bounds of human imagination, for the bloodletting will be most terrible: the rebellions of Ryazan, Pugachev and the French revolution will be nothing in comparison with what will take place in Russia. Many people who are faithful to the fatherland will perish, church property and the monasteries will be robbed; the Lord's churches will be desecrated; good rich people will be robbed and killed, rivers of Russian blood will flow..."[138]

In 1917 Elder Nectarius of Optina recounted the following vision: "His Majesty the Tsar is not his own master now, so many humiliations does he suffer for his mistakes. 1918 will be a still harder year. The Lord Tsar with all his family will be killed, tortured. A pious girl had a vision. She saw Jesus Christ on a throne, and the twelve apostles round Him, and the sounds of terrible groans and torments were audible from the earth. And the Apostle Peter asked Christ: 'When, O Lord, will these torments cease?' And Jesus Christ answered him: 'I am placing a limit to it in 1922, but if people do not repent and come to their senses, then they will all perish in this way.' In front of the throne of the Lord stood his Majesty the Tsar with a great-martyr's crown on his head. Yes, this Lord Tsar will be a great-martyr. In his last days he has redeemed his life. And if the people do not return to the Lord, not only Russia, but the whole of Europe will be swallowed up..."[139]

The people did not repent, so the opening of the seals continued:-

6.5-6. And when He had opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say: Come up and see. And I beheld, and lo! a black horse. And he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures say: A measure of wheat for a

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[138] St. Seraphim, quoted by Protopriest Victor Potapov, "*God is betrayed by silence*" (in Russian). See also *Literaturnaia Ucheba*, January-February, 1991, pp. 131-134 (in Russian).

[139] Quoted by Kontzevich, *Optina Desert and its Era*, Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1970, pp. 498-99 (in Russian).

denarius, and three measures of barley for a denarius; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

The black colour of the horse symbolises "lamentation over those who have fallen away from the faith in Christ by reason of the difficulty of the torments" (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

According to St. Victorinus of Petau, however, the black horse signifies famine[140]; for the weighing out of foodstuffs indicates their scarcity, as it is written: **When I afflict you with famine of bread, then ten women shall bake your loaves in one oven, and they shall render your loaves by weight; and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied** (Leviticus 26.26).

The Russian Civil War was followed by a terrible famine in the Volga region and, a few years later, in the Ukraine. The dates of these famines, 1922 and 1933, figure in St. John of Kronstadt's vision of 1908, in which he saw "a mass of people scattered and dying of hunger. They were eating the grass, the earth, each other. Birds picked at their corpses."[141] "The small measure which John called the Greek word χοινιξ, which contained only enough wheat to feed one man for one day, was worth a denarius."[142]

The words **See thou hurt not the oil and the wine** may indicate that the ministrations of the Church (the oil of consolation and the vinegar of reproof, or the oil of compassion and the wine of compunction[143], or the oil of Holy Chrismation and the wine of Divine Communion) were not to cease during this period. And indeed they did not. However, in the early 1920s there was a serious shortage of pure wheat bread and wine in Russia, which led to certain uncanonical innovations in the materials used in the Eucharist.[144] Moreover, from 1922 a series of schisms rocked the Russian Church; and these, combined with the exile and execution of thousands of clergy meant that for large parts of the country the word of the prophet was fulfilled: **Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send forth a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the word of God** (Amos 8.11).

6.7-8. And when He had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say: Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse; and the name of his rider was death, and hades followed after him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

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[140] St. Victorinus, op. cit., coll. 329A.
[141] St. John of Kronstadt, in Fomin, op. cit., p. 139.
[142] Th. Yakovlev, in Barsov, op. cit., p. 113.
[143] As in the prayer of Schema-Hieromonk Nilus of St. Nilus of Sora Hermitage (+1870): "Pour forth on me the oil of thy compassion and grant me to overflow with the wine of compunction" (*Orthodox Life*, vol. 32, no. 6, November-December, 1982, p. 47).
[144] See Hieromartyr Mark (Novoselov), op. cit., Letter 4.

Schema-Monk Epiphanius (Chernov) writes: "All believing Russia at the time of the 1917 revolution and up to the 1940s shuddered from the feeling that the event of which we have just spoken in the words of Revelation had undoubtedly and with great clarity been fulfilled now before the eyes of the whole of Russia - the even foreseen in eternity and written down about two thousand years ago...

"Yes, this **pale horse** has truly entered our land - the original Greek text indicates that the **horse** and **his rider** have the name **death**! For he bears in himself the fullness of death - not only physical death, but also spiritual [**hades**]... In may large towns there were so many deaths that the air itself was suffused with the stench of corpses!"[145]

Holy New Hieroconfessor Fr. Vladimir Krivolutsky confirms this judgement: "By the inscrutable ways of the Lord, but, of course, receiving what we deserve by our deeds, in our life we are witnessing the Lamb, right before our eyes, removing the fourth seal from what was meant to be…

"Until now mankind has known the first three forms of political power: but mankind has so far had no experience of the fourth kind, that is, the *consciously God-fighting* kind. This power was destined to appear when people matured in the sin of apostasy from God, of the struggle against God.

"And lo! The appearance of the **rider on the pale horse**, to whom was given **power over the fourth part of the earth**, signifies *the appearance for the first time on earth of a consciously and deliberately God-fighting power*." This power is only allowed by God, although the will of this power is directed to the annihilation in people of all that is from God, and even His very name. The Almighty Lord allowed this power to rule over men, for the will of the great majority of people, in passing through most serious sins, has matured in evil and resistance to God to the point of fighting against God (that is, Satanism)."[146]

By October, 1949, Communism had conquered China and established itself over approximately a quarter of the earth's surface. And over the whole of this area a fitting epitaph would be: **We have made a covenant with hades, and agreements with death** (Isaiah 28.15). For, as Elder Aristocles of Moscow prophesied: "Wherever this evil goes, rivers of blood will flow."[147] A Soviet demographer calculated that between 43 and 52 million people died of unnatural deaths in the Soviet Union in the Stalinist period. And further tens of millions have died in other countries. Fittingly is the rider said to be **pale** in colour - χλωρος in Greek, the colour of human flesh...

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[145] Chernov, *The Catacomb Church in the Russian Land*, Mayford, 1980 (typescript) (in Russian).
[146] Krivolutsky, "About Sergianism", http://www.stvladimirs.ca/library/about-sergianism.html.
[147] Elder Aristocles, in "To the memory of Abbess Barbara", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 33, no. 4, July-August, 1983.

But the greatest evil of the time was not the physical **death** and suffering, but the destruction of faith, spiritual death and its consequence - **hell**. Later, in the decades after Stalin's death, the persecution became less overt and the numbers of those killed became smaller. But the spiritual devastation, if it were possible, increased. As a member of the Catacomb Church writes: "We are all living through a terrible time, the time of the life of man without God, when people… have fallen under the power of Satan. The atheist and fallen Christian world, blinded by the diabolical glitter of 'modernity' - the spirit of this age - and by the demonic deception of science, progress, culture and freedom (from each person's bearing of his personal saving cross), has quickly become disillusioned in everything, seeing that 'indescribable sorrow haunts them day and night' ('Word on the Coming of the Lord', *The Works of St. Ephraim the Syrian*); that is, having been deprived of the grace of the Holy Spirit, people have lost joy in life. Besides, Satan has increased their despair by the consciousness that they will die - and that's it, while others are enjoying life; they dream of acquiring something unusually happy, but have actually received so little. For that reason everyone has passionately hurled themselves at pleasures, as if to get as much as possible. From this iniquity has multiplied (drunkenness, debauchery, violence) and love has completely cooled off in people. Moreover, people who would seem to be spiritual and believing, who bear the lofty calling of Christians.. not only cannot explain what is going on or console others with the hope of eternal salvation, but themselves go they know not whither. Why is this? Because the grace of the Holy Spirit has fled. And that is because they have renounced living faith, because (and this is the main thing) they have bound themselves with unbreakable bonds, satanic powers, in the person of the God-fighting Soviet power: they have bound themselves before them in word and in deed, they have also bound the Church of God, having forgotten the word of the Apostle Paul that **for the Word of God there is no bond** (II Timothy 2.9). They have bound themselves in that, while preaching about God with the voice of the Church, they have not truly and fully preached His Holy Will, they have not preached about the contemporary enemies of the Church of Christ. They have bound themselves before the atheist authorities so as not to preach about such terrible things as the coming into the world of the Antichrist, the persecution of the true Church of Christ; they have bound themselves not to preach about such numbers of victims of persecution as have not existed in the history of the Church (60 million believers killed, 1200 bishops, tens of thousands of priests, the destruction of 50,000 churches and about 800 monasteries). These new servants of the Church do not mention that faith has been quite quenched by the all-destructive atheist propaganda. Serving God with their lips, in their works they serve, and bless others to serve, the beast, the God-fighting society, whose main aim and final end is the complete extirpation of the faith. And they bless the service of this society not through bringing the perishing the Light of Christ and the Word of God, but by strengthening it materially. Besides, they do not present it as against God, but.. as something the like of which there has not been in history... But to have faith and do the works of the devil means, according to the Apostle James (2.19) to be like the

demons. Very true was the supposition of the Holy Fathers that the son of perdition, the Antichrist will sit in the church of God.. And so, all around there is an absence of living faith, nobody wants to understand that we are living through an apocalyptic time, that the Second Coming of Christ and His terrible judgement are near..."[148]

6.9-11. And when He had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying: How long, O Lord, holy and true, does Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto them, that they should rest for a little season, until their numbers should be completed and their fellow-servants also and their brethren should be killed as they were.

Not all those who suffered under the Soviet yoke suffered for Christ's sake. But there were enough of them - millions, probably - to call for a special judgement of God. For just as on the apostate Jews of the first century came **all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zechariah son of Baruch** (Matthew 23.35), so on apostate mankind of the twentieth century will come all the blood of the holy new martyrs of Russia.

"The souls of the righteous who have suffered for Christ, as is clear from this, are under the altar of the heavenly Church, in the same way that on earth since the times of the martyrs the custom has been to lay the relics of the holy martyrs in the foundation of Christian churches and altars. The prayer of the righteous is explained, of course, not by their desire for personal revenge, but by the speeding up of the triumph of God's justice on earth and of that rewarding of each according to his works which must be accomplished by the Terrible Judgement, making them partakers of eternal blessedness as having given their lives for Christ and His Divine teaching. They were given white robes - a symbol of their virtues - and were told to be patient **yet for a little season**, until their co-workers and brothers, who would be killed like them, would fill up their number, so that all together they might receive their worthy recompense from God." (Archbishop Averky)

Who are these other martyrs who are to be killed later? The answer is given in St. John of Kronstadt's vision, which closely follows the sequence of the seven seals: "I hurried and could scarcely keep up with the elder. Then he stopped, pointed to the east and said: 'Look!' I saw a multitude of people with joyful faces, and in their hands were crosses, gonfalons and candles, and in the middle of the crowd stood a great altar in the open air, with a golden crown on it, on which was written in golden letters: **for a little season**. Around the altar stood patriarchs, metropolitans, bishops, priests, monks, nuns, desert-dwellers and laypeople. All were chanting: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace!' I crossed myself, and gave thanks to God.

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[148] "An Apocalyptic Time", *For Orthodoxy and Autocracy*, I, 24 June, 1986 (in Russian).

Suddenly the elder made the sign of the Cross in the air three times. And I saw a mass of bodies and rivers of blood. Angels flew over the slain and scarcely succeeded in bearing up the Christian souls to the throne of God. They were chanting: 'Alleluia'. It was terrible to look on all this. I wept bitterly and prayed. The elder took me by the hand and said: 'Don't weep. The Lord God has deemed this necessary for our weak faith and accursedness, it must be so. Our Saviour Jesus Christ also suffered and shed His Most Pure Blood on the Cross. And so *there will be yet many martyrs for Christ, and they will be those who refuse to receive the seal of the Antichrist, who shed their blood and receive a martyr's crown.*'"[149]

Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava wrote in 1929: "The comparison of past and present woes with the corresponding utterances in the Gospels and the Apocalypse gives us reason to think that now four seals have already been removed by the Lamb from the book which He Who sits on the Throne and Who was seen by the seer of mysteries holds in His right hand. Not hundreds, not tens of thousands, but myriads of thousands of our brothers have laid down their lives for the Word of God and the testimony concerning the Lamb in the Great War and the horrors of civil war and anarchy that followed it. These innumerable numbers of those killed for the Word of God and the testimony concerning the Lamb now cry out to the Throne of God and call on the righteousness of God to take revenge for the crimes committed by the sons of this age. And look what reply the Wisdom of God gives to their fervent petition. He asks them to be calm for a short time until their co-workers and brothers who will be killed, as they have been, fill up the number of those crowned with a martyr's crown (Revelation 6.9-11). It follows from this that after all the horrors of war and anarchy in the world calm will nevertheless be given to the world, albeit for a short time. But the world cannot be calmed without a calmed and restored Russia. But Russia cannot be restored until the power of darkness in her is cast down and a lawful power, both according to human law and according to the law of Divine anointing, is confirmed in her. Consequently, Russia will undoubtedly be restored, and a lawful power will also be restored in her. But this calm will be given both to the Russian people and to the other sons of this age in order that they should prepare themselves for the great struggle with antichristianity, during which the number of martyrs predetermined from eternity, who must suffer for the Word of God and for the testimony concerning the Lamb, will be filled up."[150]

"Many now ask," wrote Metropolitan Anastasius of New York, "why the Russian people and the Church of Russia are suffering, and why God does not cut short the evil which nearly everywhere is so visibly triumphing over good. This last question, taken on a universal scale, has been vexing mankind from time immemorial.

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[149] St. John of Kronstadt, in Fomin, op. cit., p. 140.

[150] Archbishop Theophanes, quoted in Richard Betts, Vyacheslav Marchenko, *Confessor of the Royal Family. Hierarch Theophanes of Poltava*, Moscow: Russian section of the Valaam Society of America, 1994, pp. 152-153 (in Russian).

"'They relate,' we read in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, 'that one day, when Anthony the Great wondered at the profundity of the dispensation and judgements of God, he prayed and said: "O Lord, why are there some men who attain a ripe old age and a feeble physical condition, while others die in childhood? Why are some poor and others rich? Why do tyrants and malefactors prosper and gain earthly blessings, while the righteous are oppressed by poverty?" He had long pondered these questions when he heard a voice say: "O Anthony, look to thyself and do not subject the judgements of God to thine analysis, for such is harmful to the soul."'

"When the innocent sufferer Job wished to defend his case before God, he received a similar answer amid the thunderstorm and tempest: **Who is this that hideth counsel from Me, and confineth words in his heart, and thinketh to conceal them from Me? Gird thy loins like a man; and I will ask thee, and do thou answer Me... Do not set aside My judgement. Dost thou think that I have dealt with thee in any other way than that thou mightest appear to be righteous? Hast thou an arm like the Lord's, or dost thou thunder with a voice like His?** (Job 38.1-3; 40.3-4).

"The very friends of God are unable to attain unto the judgements of providence in the course of world history. King David the prophet said, **But as for me, my feet were all but shaken; my steps well nigh had slipped** (Psalm 72.2), when he pondered this mystery. It likewise troubled the Patriarch Abraham as he called for the loving-kindness of God when he beheld the condemned cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Prophets Jonah and Elijah, who demanded that God punish the ungodly; and the writer of Ecclesiastes, who saw that **the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor yet wealth to men of understanding** (Ecclesiastes 9.11). Righteous men knew that **[God's] eye is too pure to behold evil doings** (Habbakuk 1.13). The Prophet Jeremiah even made so bold as to try to contend with the Master of all creation Himself, lodging a complaint against His personal judgements upon the earth: **Righteous art Thou, O Lord, that I may make my defence to Thee. Yea, I will speak to Thee of judgements. Why is it that the way of the ungodly men doth prosper, that all that deal very treacherously are flourishing? Thou has planted them, and they have taken root; they have begotten children, and become fruitful** (Jeremiah 12.1-2).

"The Lord never revealed to any man the plans of His dispensation in their entirety, not because He did not wish to, but because men are unable to comprehend them due to the very limited nature of their horizons, which cannot fathom the full depth of the richness of the wisdom and understanding of God which are revealed in His divine rule over the world. To understand the ways of the providence of God in history one must know both the present condition of the world in all its fullness and the past and future judgements of the universe, for all of this is indissolubly bound up in the single plan of divine economy, and such a breadth of knowledge, of

course, is inaccessible to man, Thus, an infant cannot penetrate the thoughts and intentions of his father, who tries to foresee for him everything that is better, not only in the present, but also in the future, as well as to join his good with the good of the other members of the family.

"Only when the fullness of time is reached, the end of the world takes place, and the kingdom of Christ is opened, will all the incomprehensible judgements of God be justified for us; before them mankind, redeemed by Christ, will bow down in reverence, saying **Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving... be unto our God forever and ever**. Until that time, only occasionally, to a small degree and with particular, deliberate aims, does God reveal His all-wise will, which leads individual nations and the whole world along one or another path in history. He reveals it either directly to His chosen ones, with whom He may converse face to face, or in the very course of world events, which are directed by His right hand. Jealous for the glory of God when it is subjected to mockery by the children of disobedience, the righteous often ask why the Almighty does not immediately wreak vengeance upon the proud and impious who rise up against His eternal and omnipotent dominion. It is for this reason that He is God and not man, that He is the Holy One, as He Himself replies through the prophet (Hosea 11.9). God is too powerful, reasons Saint John Chrysostom, to wreak vengeance upon anyone immediately. At that same time, He so far transcends the world that no boastful tongue can offend or even touch Him. Every blasphemer is truly like a dog baying at the moon.

"Human zeal is often intolerant because it is not balanced with love, which comprises the essence of the divine Nature. The loving-kindness of God often, as it were, restrains for a time the hand of His chastisement. **The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance** (II Peter 3.9).

"**Thou hast mercy on all**, says another sage of the Old Testament, **for Thou canst do all things, and winkest at the sins of men, because they should amend.... Thou sparest all: for they are Thine, O Lord, Thou lover of souls** (Wisdom 11.23,26). His mercy and justice do not want to destroy the tares together with the wheat, with which they put down roots, as it were, in the same soil. He was ready to have mercy on condemned Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of ten righteous men, so that such would not perish with the ungodly, and He did not wish to destroy Nineveh for the sake of 120,000 innocent babes and even because of the irrational beasts which would have been destroyed with the people (Jonah 4.11). The very measurement of time in man's conception differs entirely from that in God's eyes. **One day is with the Lord as thousand years, and a thousand years as one day** (II Peter 3.9; Psalm 89.5). Divine providence has **ordered all things in measure and number and weight** (Wisdom 11.20). With Him everything is appointed its own time and season.

"**How long, O Lord holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?**, the souls beneath the altar, who had been slain for the Word of God and for the testimony they gave, cried out with a loud voice, as John the Theologian, the seer of mysteries, bears witness. **And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, who should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled**."[151]

The Venerable Bede writes: "The souls of the righteous cry these things, not from hatred of enemies, but from love of justice."[152]

6.12-17. And I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal. And lo! there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heavens departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks: Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?

These terrible images, which are reminiscent of many other passages in Holy Scripture (cf. Matthew 24.29; Mark 13.24-25; Luke 21.25; Isaiah 34.2-4; Joel 2.32), can be interpreted in a more literal or a more symbolical sense. Thus the Venerable Bede interprets **the sun** to be the teaching of Christ, which is temporarily hidden during the persecution, and **the stars** to be "those who sine as heavenly ones in the Church, and that in appearance alone, when they are driven by the wind of the last persecution, will be proved to have been of earth. And their works are fitly compared to green **figs**, that is, to the untimely, and useless, and falling fruit of the fig-tree."

"It seems to us that this is the transition from the time of persecution to the time before the Antichrist, when, according to the prophecy, there will be such plagues in order, perhaps, that people, in thinking about them, should not refuse to bear the punishments sent by the Antichrist – punishments which, as we know, have never taken place before.

"The earthquake, of which we often read in Scripture, is a change of things; wherefore also, the expression **yet once more I shake the earth** (Haggai 2.7)

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[151] Metropolitan Anastasius (Gribanovsky), *Conversations with My Own Heart*, Jordanville, 1948; translated in *Living Orthodoxy*, N 101, vol. XVII, September-October, 1996, pp. 19-21.
[152] St. Bede, *On Genesis* 4.10.

signifies as the Apostle says, **the removal of these things that are shaking** (Hebrews 12.26-27).

"The blackness of the sun and the darkness and blood appearance of the moon indicate, as the Blessed Cyril has often expressed it, the darkness of soul of those upon whom the wrath of God will come. And that **the stars fell**, as has been written also of those deceived by Antiochus, indicate that those who think themselves to be the lights of the world will fall, being crushed and defeated by what will happen at that time, when as the Lord has said, **If it were possible they shall deceive the very elect** by reason of the great tribulation (Matthew 24.24). This is perhaps why there is given here the indication of the fig tree, which, at the blowing of the wind of the devil, casts down its fruit while still unripe, since they have not ripened in the heat of temptations and are not sweetened by grace...

"Whether all this will turn out in a physical form at the glorious Coming of Christ the King is known by Him Who possesses the mystical treasury of knowledge and wisdom.

"The heaven is not to be subject to corruption and destruction but, as it were, to a certain rolling up and change for the better. Irenaeus, in his fifth accusatory *Homily against Reason* (falsely so-called), says: 'Neither the essence nor the being of the creation will perish or will be destroyed, for true and strong is He Who created it, but **the fashion of this world passeth away** (I Corinthians 7.31), the world in which the transgression was performed.

"At the coming of Antichrist, those (called here symbolically mountains) who are leaders either over the good order of the Church or over the worldly dominions, and the churches of the faithful which are presented here under the image of islands... will fall from their places." (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

Again, the great earthquake could signify the enormous impact of world war; the changes in the heavens - the terrible sights accompanying thermo-nuclear warfare; the men fleeing into the dens and caves of the earth - the soldiers and civilians fleeing into bomb shelters, etc.

But it is also possible to see all these phenomena as symbols of the moral-spiritual destruction of the times. Following this line of interpretation, the words **the sun became black** mean that the light of Christian truth was obscured by the darkness of heresy (ecumenism); **the moon became as blood** - the official "Church" became an associate of men of blood and guilty of the blood of the martyrs (sergianism); and **the heaven departed as a scroll, every mountain and island being moved out of their places** - traditional norms of behaviour were overturned, and every church and community of true Christians suffered great upheavals - all of which has in fact happened in our time.

"The Lord said that His Coming would be at night (Luke 17.34) because of the blindness of the world."[153]

[153] Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov; cited in Marchevsky, op. cit., p. 106.

4. The Sealing of the Servants of God

7.1-3. And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying: Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.

"In the seventh chapter," writes Fr. Alexander Kolesnikov, "the Apostle John turns to reassuring the faithful at the approach of the last times of the world. At the beginning he sees four angels, who stand at the four corners of the earth and to whom it is given to harm the earth and the sea. With this symbol of the four angels the apostle wishes to represent how the earth and mankind is condemned by the Providence of God to the miseries of the last times: the punitive heavenly powers surrounded the sphere of the earth from all corners, as if saying to the people that there is nowhere they can escape from the coming miseries.

"But it appears that there is a way of salvation for the faithful living on the earth in the last time. So as to separate the faithful from the apostate, seals are placed on the foreheads of the former. By the symbol of the placing of the seals the servants of God in the last times are warned by the apostle that, although the faithful cannot completely escape the woes sent by God upon sinners, nevertheless they can be saved, not only spiritually, but also bodily... That the faithful in times of woes also suffer, but many of them save their lives - of this there are many examples in history. For example, many thousands of Christians, being directed by Christ's foretelling of the destruction of Jerusalem and the necessity of fleeing from it in good time (Matthew 24.16-20), actually fled and thereby were saved, when the Roman armies entered Palestine in 68. The same point is confirmed by the destiny of many thousands of church people in the Soviet Union."[154]

"This is something like what was revealed to the holy Prophet Ezekiel about the man clothed in a podir, that is, a long linen garment, who places a seal **upon those who groan** (Ezekiel 9.4), so as not to destroy the righteous together with the unrighteous (for the hidden virtues of the saints are unknown even to the angels)." (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

Jean Danielou writes: "The tau, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, also in its archaic form an x, was, according to Ezekiel (9.4), the mark of Yahweh placed upon the forehead of the elect; and as such is referred to in Revelation 7.2. That this mark was thought of as representing the name of God is clear from Revelation 14.1 and 22.4. But once the move had been made to Greek

[154] Kolesnikov, *The Seer of the Future*, Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1972 (in Russian).

territory, the X, the sign of the Divine name, was… thought of as standing for… Christ, and regarded as the first letter of Χριστος. It may be recalled that with regard to the symbolism of the letter tau, Origen reports the opinion of a Jew who said that tau took its power from the fact that it was the last letter of the alphabet, and so was equivalent to the Greek Ω, the sacred letter par excellence. This seems to touch the very oldest stratum of the rite of the signatio in Jewish Christian circles, where the Jewish X comes to represent Christ as God."[155]

St. Cyprian of Carthage writes: "As when Egypt was smitten, the Jewish people could not escape except by the blood and the sign of the lamb; so when the world shall begin to be desolated and smitten, only he who is found in the blood and the sign of the Cross shall escape."[156]

Th. Yakovlev writes: "The seal of which the prophecy speaks is inexpressibly important for the Christian soul. Its first seal takes place when the seal of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is laid upon it at baptism. This is the renewal, justification and sanctification of its nature, harmed by the sins of the first parents. The apostle says of this sealing: **God Who has anointed us has also sealed us, and given us the betrothal of the Holy Spirit in our hearts** (II Corinthians 1.21, 22).He who preserves this most valuable seal will be counted worthy to receive the new seal of the living God. The first is a sign that distinguishes the Christian from the unbeliever; the second distinguishes the righteous man, who has entered into the dwelling-place of eternal rest and blessedness, from the iniquitous who are condemned to eternal torment.

"In what does this seal consist? We do not know, and it is useless to seek out this knowledge…"[157]

"We do not know what this seal consists of, and there is no need to seek this out. Perhaps it will be the sign of the precious Cross of the Lord, by which it will be possible to distinguish believers from unbelievers and apostates; or perhaps it will be the seal of martyrdom for Christ." (Archbishop Averky)

"This will primarily be fulfilled during the time of the coming of Antichrist, when the seal of the Life-giving Cross will distinguish the unfaithful from the faithful, who will bear the sign of the Cross before them unashamed and with boldness... The virtuous will need the angelic help before the coming of disasters, and this will be by the power of the seal of the Spirit which will be given us. But this seal will reveal its power only to the extent that we show our activity." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

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[155] Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964, p. 154.
[156] St. Cyprian, *Treatise 5,* 22.
[157] Yakovlev, in Barsov, op. cit., p. 117.

That God will separate the good from the evil before the disasters strike is indicated by the vision of a white hand which appeared above the Russian town of Tambov in the 1970s and wrote the following in broad daylight: "1. The bad leads to the good. 2. It is now winter for My people. 3. Days of repentance. 4. Not one righteous soul will remain among the depraved, and not one debauched soul will remain among righteous souls. 5. Be attentive to My salvation. 6. Bring forth fruits of repentance. 7. Salvation awaits those who fear the Lord. 8. Let there be an awareness of responsibility in all your actions. The time is near! 9. Truly, I will come... I will not delay. Amen."[158]

7.4-8. And I heard the number of those who were sealed; and there were sealed a hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

"The number 144,000, like other numbers in the Apocalypse, does not have a numerical, but a symbolical significance." (Protopriest Alexander Mileant).[159]

"The precise equality of the numbers of those saved from each tribe, it seems to me, indicates the fruitfulness of apostolic seed, because the number twelve taken twelve times and multiplied by a thousand gives the number indicated here, for they were the disciples of the seed which fell on the ground and brought forth the multiple fruits of universal salvation" (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

"This sealing will begin with the Israelites, who before the end of the world will be converted to Christ, as St. Paul predicts (Romans 9.27, 11.26).[160] In each of the twelve tribes there will be twelve thousand sealed, and 144,000 in all. Of these tribes only the tribe of Dan is not mentioned, because from it, according to tradition, will come the Antichrist. In place of the tribe of Dan is

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[158] *Orthodox Life*, July-August, 1977.

[159] However, Hieromartyr Victorinus wrote: "That Catholic Church in which in the last days a hundred and forty-four thousand of the people of Elijah (i.e. the Jews) shall believe...He indicates the very number of the Jews to be converted, and of the Gentiles **a great multitude**" (*Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 7.9, in *Ante-Nicene Library*, Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1870, vol. XVIII). See also St. Hilary of Poitiers, *On Matthew* 10.14; St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XX, 29; St. Gregory the Great, *On Ezekiel*, Hom. 12,7; St. John Chrysostom, *On Matthew*, Hom. 58, 1; Blessed Theodoretus, *On Daniel* 12.1 and *On Malachi* 4.1.

[160] The conversion of the Jews in the last times is prophesied in many Old Testament Scriptures (cf. Ezekiel 36.24-28; Jeremiah 31.33; Hosea 3.4-5; Zechariah 12.7, 10). (V.M.)

mentioned the priestly tribe of Levi which previously had not entered into the twelve tribes. Such a limited number is mentioned, perhaps, in order to show how small is the number of the sons of Israel who are saved in comparison with the uncountable multitude of those who have loved the Lord Jesus Christ from among all the other formerly pagan people of the earth." (Archbishop Averky)

St. Hippolytus writes: "Moses says: **Dan is a lion's whelp, and shall leap out of Basan** (Deuteronomy 32.33)... In naming the tribe of Dan, he clearly pointed out the tribe from which the Antichrist is destined to spring. For just as Christ springs from the tribe of Judah, so the Antichrist is to spring from the tribe of Dan... That it is indeed from the tribe of Dan that the tyrannical king, the son of the devil, is destined to arise, the prophet witnesses when he says: **Dan shall judge his people, as one tribe too in Israel** (Genesis 49.16)... Jeremiah, too speaks to this effect: **We shall hear the neighing of his swift horses out of Dan: the whole land quaked at the sound of the riding of his horses** (Jeremiah 8.16)."[161]

7.9-14. After this I beheld, and lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and with palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying: Salvation to our God Who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying: Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God unto the ages of ages. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me: Who are these who are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him: Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me: These are they who came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

"These in white robes are those of whom David speaks: **If I should count them they are more in number than the sand** (Psalm 138.18) - those who earlier suffered as martyrs for Christ and those who, from every tribe and people, are to receive sufferings with courage in the last times. By the pouring out of their blood for Christ some of them have white, and others will make white, the garment of their deeds." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

"In their hands they have palm branches - signs of victory over the devil. Their lot is one of eternal rejoicing before the throne of God." (Archbishop Averky)

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[161] St. Hippolytus, *On Christ and Antichrist*, 14; translated in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, vol. V.

The waving of palm branches was an element in the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23.40), the feast of ingathering, the last feast in the Jewish calendar and the only one that has not yet received a Christian fulfilment. Perhaps, therefore, there is a looking forward here to the time when this feast will be fulfilled, marking the **gathering in of the fullness of the Gentiles** of which St. Paul speaks (Romans 11.25). The fulfilment of this feast may be referred to in another prophecy: **Then every one that survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the feast of Tabernacles** (Zechariah 14.16).

Therefore this **great multitude** consists of the Gentile martyrs who come through **the great tribulation** of the last times - the persecution of the Antichrist. Together with the martyrs of previous persecutions, they, together with the Jews who will be saved, constitute **all Israel** (Romans 11.26); for the believing Jews and Gentiles together make up the whole Church of Christ, which is **the Israel of God** (Galatians 6.16)**.** Or, according to Oecumenius' interpretation, "**all Israel** is written instead of 'the greater part' of the Jews, who turn away from their sins and towards the Lord".

For, as the apostle says: **I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits: that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins** (Romans 11.25-27).

7.15. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

"As the highest reward that they will receive, it is indicated that they shall remain before the throne of God, serving Him **day and night** - indicating figuratively the uninterruptedness of this service; for, as St. Andrew says, 'There will be no night there, but a single day, illuminated not by a material sun, but by the spiritual Sun of righteousness. And perhaps by **night** is to be understood hidden and profound mysteries, and by **day** what is clear and easy to receive. The **temple of God** is the creation which has been renewed by the Spirit, or, more precisely, those who have preserved the pledge of the Spirit whole and unquenched; in whom God has promised to **dwell and walk** (II Corinthians)'." (Archbishop Averky)

7.16-17. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb Who is in the midst of throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

The Lord is my Shepherd, and I shall not want. In a place of green pasture, there hath He made me to dwell; beside the water of rest hath He nurtured me (Psalm 22.1-2).

"They shall have the bread of heaven and the water of life, and they will have no pain and will endure no misfortunes such as are depicted in the form of the sun and heat, for the time of sufferings has passed." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

"The Lamb Himself **shall feed them**, that is, guide them, and they shall be vouchsafed an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit (**living fountains of waters**). The Lord said also of the believer that **out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water** (John 7.38). The saints, being then abundantly nourished by it, and having acquired perfect knowledge after the cessation of private knowledge, and being delivered from corruption and change, will remain in endless rejoicing and joy." (Archbishop Averky)

5. The Seventh Seal: The First Six Trumpets

8.1. And when He had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

The opening of the first six seals occupies the space of one chapter (6). After a pause (chapter 7) comes the seventh seal, whose first six trumpets occupy the space of two chapters (8 and 9), and whose seventh trumpet, after another pause (chapter 10), occupies the space of a further chapter (11) - the last in this vision. Taking as a chronological anchor chapter 8, verses 10 and 11, which clearly refer to the disaster which took place at Chernobyl in 1986, we may tentatively hypothesize that the opening of the seven seals symbolise the following periods: the period of war, revolution and martyrdom from 1914 to 1949 (chapter 6); the period of peace between the Second and Third World Wars (chapter 7); the period leading up to (chapter 8) and including the Third World War (chapter 9); the period of peace after the Third World War (chapter 10); and the period of the seven-year reign of the Antichrist (chapter 11).

According to this schema, the **silence in heaven about the space of half an hour** refers to a kind of "holding of breath" before the terrible catastrophes of the Third World War. For "it is like that in the physical world, too; the approach of a storm is often preceded by a deep quietness. This silence in the heavens signified the concentration of the reverent attention of the angels and men standing before the throne of God in expectation of the terrible signs of the wrath of God before the end of this age and the appearance of the Kingdom of Christ." (Archbishop Averky)

8.2-3. And I saw the seven angels who stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

"Before the first seven angels, as chastisers of the erring human race, the saints, with an angel at their head, stand before God in prayer for men. St. Andrew of Caesarea says that the saints will entreat God that 'after the disasters which strike at the end of the world, the torments of impious and lawless men might be lessened in the future age and that by His Coming He might reward those who have laboured.'

"At the same time, the saints will again and again entreat God, just as they entreated Him at the removing of the fifth seal (6.9-11), that He might manifest His righteous judgement against the lawless and the persecutors of the Faith of Christ and might cause the fierceness of the tormentors to cease." (Archbishop Averky)

For the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5.16).

8.4-5. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth; and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

"The casting of the fire of the censer on the earth indicates the Divine judgement manifested on earth. See Ezekiel 10.2, where the coals of fire scattered over the city indicate the chastisement of Jerusalem."[162]

And He said to the man clothed with the long robe: Go in between the wheels that are under the cherubs, and fill thine hands with coals of fire from between the cherubs, and scatter them over the city (Ezekiel 10.2).

"The punishments described immediately after this are without doubt the consequences of this prayer. The Lord shows here that He does not ignore the prayers of His faithful servants. The **voices** and the **thunderings** and the rest 'indicate,' according to St. Andrew of Caesarea, 'the horrors which are to occur before the end (of the world), just as on Mount Sinai they served as symbols of the Divine Presence which frightened everyone and brought the most sensible of them to conversion'." (Archbishop Averky)

"The man who is immersed in the vanity of this life forgets about heaven and the fact that the saints care about us and help us. Our Orthodox temple and our Divine services remind us of the spiritual unity of the heavenly-earthly Church. If we look more closely into the visions of the Apocalypse which are presented here, we shall see a striking similarity with our temple and order of liturgy. In heaven there is an altar and the slain Lamb, elders in golden crowns surrounding the throne, seven lampstands, censers with incense, and the assemblies of those standing in front. How close this description is to all that takes places with us in the altar during the Divine Liturgy! With us, as in heaven, there is an altar, and the Lamb in the sacred Communion Gifts, clergy-elders surrounding the altar, a seven-branched candlestick, a censer with fragrant smoke ascending. Here the clergy and the chanters and the worshippers unite with the angels and saints into one choir for the glorification of God worshipped in Trinity: 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory...' Truly, in our temple everything reminds us of this and supports our link with the heavenly Church." (Protopriest Alexander Mileant)

8.6. And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

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[162] Rose, op. cit., p. 144, note.

"Here there follows the sounding of the trumpets one after the other, of all seven angels, which are accompanied each time by great disasters and punishments for the earth and its inhabitants." (Archbishop Averky)

8.7. The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth; and the third part of trees was burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

"The **fire mingled with blood** indicates the destruction of cities,... their fires and blood-letting, during which, as we shall see, not less than one third of all the creatures living on earth will be killed; for wars exterminate not only men, but also everything produced on earth. Our supposition and opinion regarding this is confirmed by the blessed Joel, for he says that before the coming of the great day there will be sent on earth **blood and fire and vapour of smoke** (Joel 2.30)." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

"The chastisements of God follow gradually, indicating the mercy and long-suffering of God calling sinners to repentance. At first the chastisement of God strikes a third of the trees and all the green grass. Wheat and other grasses are burned to the root - those things which are necessary for the sustenance of men and animals. By **hail and fire mingled with blood... cast upon the earth** many commentators understand a war of extermination. Does this not refer to an aerial bombardment with its destructive incendiary bombs?" (Archbishop Averky)

8.8-9. And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea; and the third part of the sea became blood; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

This verse is paralleled by the second vial of wrath poured out by the second angel in Revelation 16.3.

"One may suppose that on the bottom of one of the oceans there will open up a volcano whose fiery lava will fill the third part of the water basins of the earth, bringing death to everything alive. Others think that what is referred to here are bloody sea battles with the help of newly invented murderous weapons." (Archbishop Averky)

Fr. Stephen Krasovitsky writes: "The **mountain** could well be the melting of gigantic mountains of ice at the poles under the influence of 'the greenhouse effect' and the widening of 'holes' in the ozone layer above the Antarctic, which allows burning ultra-violet rays to pass through unhindered. As a result of the melting of the ice-caps there will be a merging of the waters of the oceans with microscopic algae of a red colour coming from the depths of the sea to the surface. These will consume oxygen, as a result of which the water will look like blood, and a third part of the living creatures of the sea will die. Scientists supposed that the approach of the greenhouse effect will take place almost instantaneously and will be accompanied by cyclones,

tornadoes and floods, as a result of which not only the inhabitants of the earth will suffer, but especially those who will be on the sea at that time (**the third part of the ships** will be destroyed)."[163]

According to a prophecy of the Catacomb Church Eldress Seraphima of Michurinsk, all the Christians will be rounded up and incarcerated on the Arctic island of Novaia Zemlia. But a sudden change of weather for the warmer will save them.[164] Such a change could take place either as a result of global warming or a result of the general heating of the earth's atmosphere during a nuclear holocaust. There are indications that it is already taking place in Northern Russia.[165]

However, **a great mountain burning with fire cast into the sea** suggests another explanation. Novikova writes: "Reading the prophecies, we have often asked ourselves a series of questions: 'Can a "pillar of fire" arise in the sea after an earthquake?' 'Will the smell of sulphur spread everywhere, and will there be a toxic hail causing sores on the bodies of men and a poisoning of the water that gives the water the taste of wormwood?' These forecasts related to the future, and it just so happens that we are really confronted with the approach of an ecological catastrophe, a part of which is the poisoning of the waters of the Pacific Ocean by hydrogen sulphide...

"The Black Sea is located in a seismically dangerous zone. During an earthquake sharp movements of the sea bottom could elicit landslips and the destruction of a thickness of sedimentary rocks. The gases released by this burst out onto the surface of the sea. The slightest spark - and the sea ignites, and a 'pillar of fire' rises over us. Then streams of fuel impregnated with the moisture of the atmosphere rise up. Gradually the moisture condenses and even in fine weather clouds are formed. Burning hydrogen sulphide spreads suffocating odours of sulphur, while the product of the burning (sulphur dioxide), uniting with water, produces sulphuric acid. A cloud is formed out of which an acid hail falls, poisoning all the fresh water. There is no doubt that the picture 'drawn' by the scientists truly signifies the end of the world..."[166]

8.10-11. And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood; and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

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[163] Krasovitsky,
[164] Monk Epiphanius (Chernov), op. cit..
[165] See Julius Strauss, "Siberians fear minus 30 is too warm for comfort", *The Daily Telegraph,* March 5, 2005, p. 15.
[166] Svetlana Novikova, "Are we ourselves preparing the end of the world?" *Banner of Youth (Znamya Yunosti),* May 16, 1995, p. 3 (in Russian).

Cf. 16.4: **The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of waters, and they became blood.**

"The star indicates either that all this comes upon men from the heavens, or it signifies the devil, of whom Isaiah says: **How has Lucifer fallen from heaven, that rose in the morning!** (14.12). For he, making men drunk through pleasures by his stormy and bitter corruption, is allowed by God to bring a tormenting tribulation, if not upon all, then at any rate upon the third part." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

The word translated "wormwood" in English, αψινθος in Greek, is "chernobyl" in Ukrainian; and on April 29th, 1986, a nuclear reactor exploded at Chernobyl in the Ukraine, causing widespread pollution, deaths and misformed births.

This extraordinary "coincidence" leads one to speculate that the whole of this passage (8.7-11, perhaps also 12) refers to the whole of that epoch contemporaneous with our own, when environmental disasters of the Chernobyl type have brought disaster to that third of the world which is, or was, under communist domination.[167]

Another possibility is that the destruction of the atomic reactors at Fukishima in Japan is meant. It has poisoned the waters in a much more direct manner than Chernobyl and on a far greater scale. Thus "a senior scientist at the Japanese government's Meteorological Research Institute,

[167] M. Christensen writes: "The Slavic name for the bitter Wormwood plant is Chornobyl (Ukrainian spelling). In Russian, the name of the plant is Polyn, also known as Chernobyl. (Chernyi means dark/black while byl literally means story (the past tense of existence) and connotes the bitterness of being, the blackness of existence, the darkness of reality).17 In Ukrainian Bibles, the Greek word apsinthos (absinthe) in Revelation 8:11 is understood as Chornobyl--which invites its popular association with the 1986 disaster near the historic town of Chernobyl. Chernobyl is first mentioned in twelfth century manuscripts as a settlement near the River Pripyat in Lithuania (later Poland and Ukraine), and was settled by an apocalyptic sect of Old Believers in 1775, under the headship of one Illarian Petrov.18 The "Chernobylites" preached the arrival of the Antichrist and the imminent end of the world. Whether they migrated to Chernobyl because they believed the end centered around that town, we do not know. Illarian Petrov, according to Russian journalist, Andrey Illesh, "bore the rather strange nickname 'Cows Legs' and was known for his extreme fanaticism." The Chernobylites were persecuted because they "refused to pray for the tsar, acknowledge passports, forbade military service and oaths, and behaved in a contrary manner." At the end of the nineteenth century (when the end did not come), the sect emigrated to Austria.19 The symbolic (or prophetic) connection between nineteenth-century Chernobylites and twentieth-century Chernobyl apocalypticism is an obvious one, according to Illesh. When a Russian, Belarusian or Ukrainian familiar with the town of Chernobyl and its nuclear disaster reads about Chornobyl in the eighth chapter of the text, apocalyptic associations can be expected. "The lines from the Revelation in the Bible are known by practically everyone," Illesh explained in 1987. "The connection between Chernobyl and the Apocalypse was suggestive," and attractive to apocalyptic mentality." (*The Russian Idea Of Apocalypse: Nikolai Berdyaev's Theory Of Russian Cultural Apocalyptic.* Proceedings of 3rd Annual Conference of the Center for Millennial Studies, 1998, http://www.mille.org/publications/Confpro98/christensen.)

[Michio Aoyama] said levels of radioactive cesium 137 in the surface water of the Pacific Ocean could be 10,000 times as high as contamination after Chernobyl."[168]

8.12. And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so that the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.

"We think that this is akin to what is said about the sun and the moon by Joel (Joel 2.10) and which has already been ordained by the decree of the Master for the end. We repeat that the third part of the luminaries and stars indicates the third part of the duration of the day and night. From this we understand that God at that time will bring about disasters not all at once; for, allowing only a third part of time to be damaged, in the remaining and large part he secretly calls to repentance. Indeed, who can bear the cup of Divine wrath unmingled?" (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

"It is not possible for us to understand this at the present time. One thing is clear: that this is to be accompanied by various disasters for men - bad harvest, famine, and so forth." (Archbishop Averky)

Perhaps the darkening of the celestial bodies refers to the effects of the destruction of the Kuwaiti oil wells at the end of the Gulf War in 1991, which led to a darkening of the sun. Or perhaps this passage refers only to spiritual catastrophes: the eclipse of the Sun of Righteousness, Jesus Christ, in men's souls; the connivance of the moon, i.e. the Church, in murder, as the Moscow Patriarchate has connived at the murder of so many of the new martyrs of Russia; and the falling of stars, that is, bishops, into heresy.

8.13. And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice: Woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

"For those who have their dwelling in the heavens, the disasters and sufferings are the cause of receiving unfading crowns and rewards" (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

Ivan Marchevsky writes: "Here, in some very old manuscripts from the 3rd to the 5th centuries (Oxyrhynch. 2; Sinaiticus; Alexandrinus), instead of **an angel** there is **an eagle** - the herald of woes, of wars (Luke 17.37)."[169]

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[168] *New York Times,* March 16, 2014.
[169] Marchevsky, op. cit., p. 116.

"This voice of the angel indicates the love of mankind and the compassion of the divine angels, who feel pity for the impenitent men who are subjected to such disasters." (Archbishop Averky)

9.1-3. And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth; and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth; and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

"With regard to the star, I think it is an angel of God. By God's permission he leads out of the pit the evil demons who have been condemned, those whom Christ bound when He was incarnate, so that they might do their work before the end and then be subjected to endless torment." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

That there are evil demons confined in hades is revealed by the holy apostle Jude: **The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness** (v. 6). And that God can use such demons for His own righteous purposes is revealed by the story of the ten plagues of Egypt, so similar to these plagues of the last times; for they, as David says, were **the wrath of His anger, anger and wrath and affliction, a mission performed by evil angels** (Psalm 77.53).

The smoke coming out of the pit and the furnace and darkening the sky is reminiscent of the effects of a volcanic explosion, such as that which occurred in Iceland in April, 2010, which spread a cloud of volcanic ash all over Europe.

However, Fr. Oleg Molenko offers a different interpretation: "The star falling from the sky is a rocket with a nuclear warhead, the fall and explosion of which opens (that is why it is called a key) the abyss of nuclear war.

"The smoke from the great furnace is a visual description of an atomic explosion, which we have been able to seen up to now only in documentary films (the so-called atomic mushroom-cloud). Never having seen anything of the sort before, the Apostle John successfully compares the atomic explosion he has seen to the smoke from a great furnace.

"The darkening of the sun and air from this smoke well describes the 'effect of the nuclear winter' that follows a nuclear explosion on land.

"The description goes on to describe the entrance into the war of contemporary aircraft – notably, supersonic military aircraft that are described as locusts."[170]

[170] Molenko, http://www.omolenko.com/texts/tolk9_3.htm (in Russian).

9.4-10. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men who have not the seal of God on their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails; and their power was to hurt men five months.

"That death does not come even though men desire it indicates that this depends upon the decree of God, Who considers it profitable through the bitterness of the disasters which are sent to make the sin which is the very cause of such disasters hateful to men" (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

"Contemporary commentators, not with a certain reason, find a kinship between these locusts and aeroplanes and their bombing attacks." (Archbishop Averky) We can go further: the locusts bear a striking resemblance to Russian helicopter-gunships of the "Hind" type.[171] The resemblance can be seen in frescoes depicting this scene from the Apocalypse on the walls of Dionysiou monastery, Mount Athos (see back cover).

Their appearance is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they pursue. As the sound of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap... The locusts... even My great army (Joel 2.4-5, 3.25).

"The power which the earthly scorpions have indicates the neuro-paralytic effect of chemical weapons employed by the airplane-locusts. It does not harm plants, but only the people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads, which is affirmed in the fourth and fifth verses.

"The people falling under the influence of this chemical weaponry of neuro-paralytic effect will be terribly tormented and will want to do away with themselves in order to escape their torments, but will not be able to do this, for they will be paralysed. Death will flee from them only while the effect of the chemical weaponry lasts, then they will die…

"In appearance the locusts will be like horses prepared for battle – if we were to imagine a military aerodrome when the military planes are drawn up

[171] Michael Sadykiewicz, "The deadly flying herd of Hinds facing Nato", *The Sunday Times* (London), 9 January, 1983, p. 11. More modern gunships look not dissimilar.

in rows, they are truly like the formation of horses prepared for war. Prepared – for the planes have not yet moved from their places and are not flying, but their pilots have already taken their places.

"And on their heads they have something like golden wreaths – the cockpits of the planes are made out of transparent plastic, under which the heads of the pilots in their helmets are visible…

"But their faces are the faces of men – we know that under the protective suit or uniform of the contemporary aviator and behind the glass of the helmet there are living people. But how would this have appeared to him who saw them 2000 years ago? John the seer saw the faces of men inside very strange and very unusual for him uniform-objects, that is why he wrote about the faces 'as' of men.

"Their hair is **as the hair of women**… The gas train let out by a supersonic aeroplane… creates the impression of 'women's hair'…

"And they had teeth like those of lions. These are the bombs and rockets that are hung under the aircraft, and which are like teeth for the 'locust'. And so that it should be understood that these are not small 'teeth' for chewing food (as, for example, in a squirrel), but big 'teeth' for attacks, it is said that they are **as the teeth of lions.**

"They had **breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron –** and today many, even educated people cannot give the exact composition of the metallic alloy out of which frames of contemporary aircraft. But we know exactly that this alloy of grey-white colour contains in itself much aluminium, but not iron. John the Theologian describes the plating of the frames of the aircraft he saw as **as it were breastplates,** and their metallic composition **as it were of iron**, for he saw that it was not iron, but a metal (alloy) unknown at that time.

"And the sound of their wings was **as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle**. We see that the 'locusts' had wings, which is what we see on planes. That is why the suggestion that the locusts must be understood to be helicopters… is in my opinion incorrect. Against the helicopter theory is the 'hair' from the gas train, and the noise from the wings, and not from blades, and the strength of this noise… The sound of helicopters cannot be compared with the roar of supersonic aircraft. Moreover, the 'locusts' will be sent into battle immediately after an atomic explosion. That is why it is impossible to imagine helicopters flying through the zone of nuclear contamination, for this would be disastrous for the pilots. It is quite another matter with aeroplanes flying from a height.

"They had **tails like unto scorpions** – we see tails on aeroplanes. Helicopters also have tails, but they are significantly smaller.

"**And there were stings in their tails** – this also points directly to aeroplanes, in whose tails there is a flame… like a **sting**. This refutes the helicopter theory, because they do not have 'stings' in their tails. [172]

9.11. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

"By the king of these locusts, who bears the name **angel of the bottomless pit** - "Abaddon" in Hebrew, "Apollyon" in Greek - the commentators understand the devil." (Archbishop Averky)

"Apollyon" means "destroyer".[173] The fact that the name of this demon is given in both Hebrew and Greek may mean that the events here described are of particular importance for both the Jews and the Gentiles. Our supposition is that the locust invasion is a Russian invasion of the Middle East, beginning with the conquest of Constantinople and Turkey and continuing with the conquest of Egypt and Israel. Several of the Greek prophets speak of the conquest of Constantinople by a blonde race beginning with the letter "R".[174]

This occupation will last "until the fifth hour" (St. Constantine's tomb) or "for six and five" (St. Methodius of Patara).[175] We suppose that this means: "between five and six months", for the climax of the prophecy of Hieromartyr Constantius the Russian of Constantinople covers a period of little over five months: "On July 8th two unheard-of wars will coincide. On August 12th there will be an unbearable heatwave. On December 18th half mankind will perish."[176] This is more or less consistent with the Apocalypse's **five months**.

It is at this point that the following Old Testament prophecies begin to help us: Ezekiel 38 and 39, Joel 2, Amos 7.1-3, Daniel 11.40-45 and Zechariah 14. Ezekiel says that in the last times an unprecedentedly mighty army will come from the extreme north against Israel called **Gog and Magog**, which most ancient commentators identified with the region north of the Black Sea[177], or **Ros, Mosoch and Tubal**.[178] Now **Ros** is the ancient name for *Russia*; and **Tubal**, according to Blessed Theodoretus of Cyrus, is Georgia.[179]

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[172] Molenko, http://www.omolenko.com/texts/tolk9_3-4.htm (in Russian).
[173] Marchevsky, op. cit., p. 119.
[174] See the prophecies of Hieromartyr Methodius of Patara, St. Andrew the Fool-for-Christ of Constantinople, St. Tarasius of Constantinople, Emperor Leo the Wise, Hieromartyr Cosmas of Aitolia and on the tomb and column of St. Constantine the Great, translated in Sotiropoulos, op. cit.
[175] Quoted in Delimpasy, *Terrible and Wonderful Things*, Athens, 1986, pp. 36 (in Greek).
[176] Bishop Gregory of Messenia, op. cit.
[177] cf. Josephus, *On Antiquities*, VI, 1; St. Proclus of Constantinople, in Socrates' *Ecclesiastical History*, VII, 41.
[178] St. Jerome interpreted **Ros, Mosoch and Tubal** to mean "head", "insanity" and "universal". See his *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 454, *P.L.* 25 (in Latin).
[179] Blessed Theodoretus, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 66.19. Henry Morris (*The Genesis Record*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1976, pp. 247-248) believes **Mosoch** (or Mesech) to be

That there is a link between the locusts and Gog, i.e. Russia, is strikingly indicated by the words of Amos: **Behold, a swarm of locusts coming from the east; and behold, one caterpillar, King Gog** (Amos 7.1).

The identification with Russia is made still more likely by the fact that there is a link between the leader of the locusts, **Apollyon**, or Apollo, and the original meaning of the word "Russia". Thus Fr. Stephen Krasovitsky writes: "The Apocalypse here calls the devil **the angel of the bottomless pit**: in Hebrew - **Abaddon,** but in Greek - **Apollyon.** The cult of Apollo in the north is the cult of the god Hors, to which in pagan antiquity human sacrifices were brought. From the name 'Hors' [whose symbol is the horse] arose the names 'hrosy', 'rosy', the people of the Rossy (Russy)."[180]

This host is accompanied by the **Persians and Ethiopians and Libyans**, **Gomer** (Crimea), **Thorgamah** (Armenia) and **many other nations.** This looks like a re-creation of the Soviet Union together with its Middle Eastern allies. They are challenged by **Sabba** (North Yemen), **Daedan** (Saudi Arabia) **and Carthaginian merchants** (Lebanon?), as well as by **Israel** and **Egypt**; **while there shall escape out of his hand Edom, Moab and the chief of the children of Ammon** (Jordan?) (Daniel 11.41). This mighty army will conquer Israel and Egypt and take an enormous amount of plunder. On its way back from Egypt, however, while it is **on the mountains of Israel** between the Dead and the Mediterranean Seas, it will suffer destruction in a manner reminiscent of the effects of a nuclear explosion: **And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will smite all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh shall rot while they are still on their feet, they eyes shall rot in their sockets, and their tongues shall rot in their mouths** (Zechariah 14.12).

St. Andrew of Caesarea writes of Ezekiel's Gog and Magog that "some interpreters of the prophet have referred them to the battle of the Assyrians under Sennacherib with Hezekiah. But this event took place many years before the prophecy of Ezekiel. Others refer them to the defeat of the peoples who attacked the inhabitants of Jerusalem when they, after the Babylonian captivity, wanted to repair and strengthen the walls of the city in accordance with the command, first of the Persian Cyrus, and then of Darius. They also refer them to the armies of Antiochus, which were defeated by the Maccabees. It is clear, however, that their advent corresponds above all to the last times. It

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Moscow and **Tubal** - Tobolsk! Plumptre (*The Bible Educator*, London: Cassell, Petter & Green, vol. III, p. 251) writes: "The name Gog seems to be found in the name Gogarene, a district of Armenia, west of the Caspian (Strabo, xi, 528)... [Mesech] are generally identified with the Moschi, a race inhabiting part of the country between the Euxine and Caspian seas, and who were subdued by Tiglath-pileser I. They were neighbours to Tubal, a race dealing in iron, a branch of trade for which the south-east coast of the Euxine was early famous. The name Muscovy is thought with fair probability to be derived from Meshech (Rawlinson, *Ancient Monuments* ii. 65)."

[180] Krasovitsky, *Christ or Hors?*, Moscow: Erebus, 1996, pp. 16-17; "The Cult of Apollo in Northern Europe", *Angel Valaama*, N 10, September, 1994, pp. 2-3; "Gog and Magog", *Orthodox Tver*, nos. 5-6 (18-19), May-June, 1996, p. 4 (in Russian)

is possible to assert this, first, because nowhere in the sacred books is there mention of wars of the Jews with the Scythians, only of wars with neighbouring peoples who envied their sudden enrichment; secondly, because it is written concerning Gog that he will be prepared from ancient times and will come in the last times; and thirdly, because in this revelation foretelling the future (Revelation 20) it is said that Gog and Magog will come at the end of this age."

However, while the invasion of Gog will undoubtedly take place "at the end of the age", it will not itself bring this age to an end. This is indicated by the fact that after the great battle there will be a seven-year "mopping up" period, which is described in the rest of Ezekiel 39. **For these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by** (Luke 21.9).

9.12-19. One woe is past; and behold, there come two more woes hereafter. And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet: Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and those that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone; and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and the smoke, and by the brimstone which issued out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails; for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, with them they do hurt.

"Some say that these four angels are Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael, who, bound by the joy of the contemplation of God, will be loosed on the day of judgement together with an innumerable multitude of angels to judge the impious, of whom a third will be annihilated. But I think that these four angels are the most cunning demons who were bound at the coming of Christ and who, by the command of God which comes from the heavenly altar (an image of which was the ancient tabernacle), are loosed by the Divine angel to agitate the peoples not only against Christians, but also against each other, so that through this some might be manifested as tested, faithful and worthy of the best rewards, the highest mansions and dwellings like ripe wheat; while others, like tares, the impious, inconstant sinners and unrepentant and here justly punished, might receive a yet harder condemnation at the judgement. And that they were bound at the Euphrates is nothing strange, for, by God's permission, some were condemned until the time in the bottomless pit, others in wine, and some in other places, so that after the final end of the battle against men they might be subjected to eternal torments. Perhaps the mention of the Euphrates is an indication that Antichrist will come from those lands" (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

Some have interpreted this army as literally crossing the Euphrates in Iraq. , Certainly, the Euphrates, flowing as it does through the Muslim countries of Turkey, Syria and Iraq, may signify a Pan-Islamic alliance directed against Russia. However, there seems no other nation on earth that can put an army of two hundred million men into the field except *China* - and it was from China that the holy elders John of Kronstadt, Aristocles of Moscow and Theodosius of Minvody saw the deliverance of Russia coming. According to military experts, China can put 200 million soldiers into the field.[181] So perhaps the Chinese will invade the Middle East to cut off Russia and support the Islamic alliance.[182] According to another interpretation the Euphrates is in fact symbolic for the River Amur, the border between Russia and China.

The description of the army is similar to the description of the locusts; so perhaps their fire-breathing "horses" are in fact "frightful mounted army tanks which spout forth fire" (Archbishop Averky). Here, however, they may belong to a Chinese-Islamic alliance rather than to the Russians. They are said to destroy about a third of mankind; but since some of the previous plagues are already said to have destroyed a third of mankind, we should perhaps conclude that a third, or perhaps two thirds of mankind will be destroyed by all the plagues and wars of chapters eight and nine taken together. Consistent with this are the prophecies of Hieromartyr Constantius the Russian, who said that on December 18 of a certain year "one half of mankind will perish"[183], and of St. Cosmas of Aitolia, who said that as a result of "the general war" "three countries will become one".[184]

St. Cosmas also said: "We shall see people flying through the air like blackbirds, and casting fire onto the earth. People will run to the grave and shout: 'Come out, you dead, let us lie in your graves'."[185]

9.20-21. And the rest of the men who were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood, which neither see, nor hear, nor walk; neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

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[181] "Ekspert: veroiatnost' aggressii Kitaia protiv Rossii 95%" (Expert: probability of aggression of China against Russia is 95%), http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/1256448/, October 3, 2013. It is possible, however, that the figure of 200 million refers, not to soldiers, but to the numbers of immigrants that the Chinese government is planning to send into Siberia. See http://3rm.info/mainnews/58246-prorochestva-ispolnyayutsya-kitayskoe-nashestvie-v-deystvii-video.html.

[182] Marchevsky, op. cit., p. 119.

[183] Bishop Gregory of Messenia, op. cit.

[184] Metropolitan Augustine of Florina, *St. Cosmas of Aitolia*, Athens: Stavros, 1981, p. 343 (in Greek).

[185] "Prophecies on the last times by Hieromartyr Cosmas", *Orthodox Russia*, N 2 (1479), January 15/28, 1993, p. 10 (in Russian).

The materialism of the last days is here represented under the image of idol-worship. For materialists are in essence idolaters, **whose god is their belly** (Philippians 3.19), who worship, not God, but Mammon. Therefore **neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written: The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for examples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come** (I Corinthians 10.7-11).

Murders here could include the extraordinary number of abortions that now take place in almost every "civilized" country.

6. The Seventh Seal: The Mighty Angel

10.1-2. And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud; and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire. And he had in his hand a little book open; and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth.

As in 4.3, we again see the image of the rainbow, which signifies the mercy of God after catastrophe. And after the Third World War there will be a period of peace and regeneration, in which Orthodox Christianity will triumph. This will be a "breathing space" before the final battle in the time of the personal Antichrist, and may be that short rest mentioned in 6.9.

"This appearance has the form of an introductory account before the seventh and final trumpet. It stops the continuation of the prophetic allegories but does not interrupt them... St. Andrew of Caesarea considers that this is… perhaps one of the seraphim adorned with the glory of God. His standing on the sea and on the earth signifies dominion over the elements of the earthly world: 'The pillars of fire signify the fear and punishment brought by the angel upon the impious who have robbed on the earth and the sea'." (Archbishop Averky)

However, this figure might also be the holy Archangel Michael. For in Daniel, after the destruction of **the king of the north**, we read that **Michael the great prince shall stand up, that stands over the children of men** (12.1). Moreover, St. Ephraim the Syrian identifies the destroyer of Gog and Magog's army with the Archangel Michael: "Then Divine Justice will call upon Michael, the leader of the hosts, and send him to destroy their camps, as the camps of Sennacherib. At the command, and with his mighty and terrible sword, the angel shall go forth and destroy their armies in the twinkling of an eye, and in the same moment Divine Justice, thundering from on high, shall destroy their camps with rocks of fire. Their slain shall lie upon the ground, innumerable as the sands. Beasts and men shall die, and the whole camp shall perish, and flame shall be set loose against the sea and against the islands. The bow of Gog, the evil king, shall fall from his left hand, and the arrows from his left (Ezekiel 39.3); and his camp shall be wholly destroyed. Then the Lord from His glorious heaven shall set up His peace. And the kingdom of the Romans [the Orthodox Christian empire] shall rise in place of this latter people, and establish its dominion upon the earth, even to its ends, and there shall be no one who will resist it..."[186]

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[186] St. Ephraim, *Sermon on Gog and Magog and on the end and consummation*; translated by M.F. Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, London: Longmans, 1963, vol. 4, p. 355. Following in this tradition, the Venerable Bede (and with only small alterations, the French monk Adso, *Libellus de Antichristo*) says of the last Orthodox king: "And then will arise a king by name and of steadfast mind. The same will be the steadfast king of the Romans and Greeks... And the king himself will have before his eyes the Scripture saying: the king of the Romans [will] claim for himself [acquire] the whole kingdom of the lands [of the Christians]; therefore will he lay waste all the islands and cities [of the heathen], and destroy all the

It is not known whether the resurrected empire mentioned here by St. Ephraim is the New Rome, Constantinople, whose resurrection is foretold by several Greek prophecies, or the Third Rome, Russia, whose resurrection is prophesied by a number of recent Russian prophecies. Perhaps it is both. But one thing is clear: that the state defeated in the world war, and called **locusts** in Joel and Revelation, and **Gog and Magog** in Ezekiel, is Russia. Thus St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher says: "All the nations of Europe will be armed against Russia. The Tsar [i.e. the Russian leader, whatever his contemporary title] will summon all his European and Asiatic peoples. The belligerents will meet in an immensely wide plain where a terrific battle will be fought and will last for eight days. The result will be a victory of the West over the Russians."[187]

It seems reasonable to identify this eight-day battle with the two three-day battles mentioned by the anonymous Athonite prophet of 1053, which also ends in the defeat of Russia, the intervention of an angel and the resurrection of Orthodoxy: "Battle of seven states for Constantinople and slaughter for three days. Victory of the largest state over the six. Union of the six states against the seventh, Russia, and slaughter for three days. *Cessation of the war by an Angel of Christ God*, and handing over of the city to the Greeks. Submission of the Latins to the unerring faith of the Orthodox. Exaltation of the Orthodox faith from the East to the West. Cessation of the Roman papacy. Declaration of one patriarch for the whole of Europe for five or fifty years. In the seventh is no wretched man; no one is banished. Returning to the arms of Mother Church rejoicing. Thus shall it be. Thus shall it be. Amen."

St. Agathangelus confirms that the Roman papacy will bow to the Truth of Orthodoxy: "Stone will not be left upon stone in your walls, and you will be desolate like the holy city of David. You will humble your haughty neck and go to worship with him who conquered my sanctuary in Byzantium." And he also confirms the fifty-year peace: "For full fifty years peace shall reign. Truth shall triumph, and the sky will rejoice in true glory. The Orthodox faith will be exalted and will spring from East to West to be blessed and praised... Then God shall be glorified, and man shall see the works of His omnipotence. May it be so. It shall be so. Amen."[188]

It is of these years that the Lord says through the Prophet Joel: **I will restore all those years that the locusts have taken** (2.25).

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temples of the false gods, and all the pagans will he call to baptism, and the cross of Christ shall be raised over all the temples." During the reign of this king the Jews will be converted, and he will vanquish the nations of Gog and Magog with their twelve or twenty-two kingdoms. "[And thereafter the king] will come to Jerusalem, and there laying aside his diadem, he will resign unto God the Father and His Son Christ Jesus the Christian kingdom (*P.L.* 90, p. 1183).

[187] Bishop Gregory of Messenia, op. cit.; A. Panagopoulos, *Saints and Wise Men on what is going to happen*, Athens: Agios Nikodemos.

[188] Op. cit., pp. 12, 19.

After the world war, according to the Greek prophecies, an Orthodox king will come to power in Constantinople with the name of John, who, according to Emperor Leo the Wise, will nationalise essential goods and services, make homosexuality a capital offence, cleanse the Church of false priests and install true ones. This is in accordance with another, anonymous prophecy, which says that he will "chase the bad priests from the sanctuary and re-establish God's altar".[189] And according to St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher he will convene "a last and Eighth Ecumenical Council to deal with the disputes of heretics and separate the wheat from the chaff."[190] As we have seen, St. Seraphim of Sarov also prophesied the convening of a last great Council - but by a Russian emperor. According to St. Andrew the Fool-for-Christ, he will "lay his right hand on the nations all around, taming the blonde nations", and Hieromartyr Methodius says that he "will go out against the Ishmaelites [i.e. the Muslims]", and "will divide them into three parts. The first part "he will destroy "with the sword", "but the second he will baptize", and the third he will enslave in the East.[191] St. Cosmas of Aitolia prophesied that "the Turks will learn the mysteries three times faster than the Christians."[192] Then, continues St. Methodius, "the earth's treasures will be opened up and everyone will become rich. There will be no paupers, the earth will bring forth a hundred-fold, and the weapons of war will be turned into ploughs and scythes. And he [the king] will reign for thirty-five years."[193] As St. Cosmas puts it: "Happy will he be who lives after the general war. He will eat with silver spoons."[194]

Let us consider some further prophecies:-

1. Hieromonk Anthony of St. Sabbas' Monastery, based on Anonymous Greek Prophecies (8th or 9th century): "The last days have not yet arrived, and it is completely wrong to consider that we are on the threshold of the coming of the antichrist, because one last flourishing of Orthodoxy is still to come, this time in the whole world, headed by Russia. This will take place after a terrible war in which either one half or two thirds of humanity will perish, and which will be stopped by a voice from heaven: '**And the Gospel will be preached throughout the world**'.

"1) For until that time there will have been preached, not the Gospel of Christ, but the Gospel distorted by heretics.

"2) There will be a period of universal prosperity - but not for long.

"3) In Russia during this period there will an Orthodox tsar, whom the Lord will reveal to the Russian people.

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[189] Quoted in Delimpasy, op. cit., p. 65.
[190] Quoted in Sotiropoulos, op. cit.
[191] Quoted in Delimpasy, op. cit., p. 64.
[192] Quoted in Delimpasy, op. cit., p. 74.
[193] Quoted in Sotiropoulos, op. cit.
[194] Quoted in Delimpasy, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

"And after this the world will again be corrupted and will no longer be capable of correction. Then the Lord will allow the enthronement of the Antichrist."[195]

2. Another Anonymous Prophecy from St. Sabbas' Monastery (8th or 9th century): "At various times this great people [the Russians] will fall into sin and for this will be chastised through considerable trials. In about a thousand years [i.e. in the 1900s] this people, chosen by God, will falter in its Faith and its standing for the Truth of Christ. It will become proud of its earthly might and glory, will cease to seek the Kingdom and will want paradise not in Heaven but on this sinful earth.

"However not all this people will tread this broad and pernicious path, though a substantial majority will, especially its governing class. On account of this great fall, a terrible fiery trial will be sent from on high to this people which will despise the ways of God. Rivers of blood shall flow across their land, brother shall slay brother, more than once famine shall visit the land and gather its dread harvest, nearly all the churches and other holy places shall be destroyed or suffer sacrilege, many shall perish.

"A part of this people, rejecting iniquity and untruth, will pass over the borders of their homeland and will be dispersed like unto the people of the Jews all over the world. Nevertheless the Lord will not show His wrath on them to the uttermost. The blood of thousands of martyrs will cry to the heavens for mercy. A spirit of sobriety will grow among this chosen people and they will return to God. At last this period of cleansing trial, appointed by the Righteous Judge, will come to an end, and once more Holy Orthodoxy will shine forth and those northern lands will be resplendent with the brightness of a faith reborn.

"This wonderful light of Christ will shine forth from there and enlighten all the peoples of the earth. This will be helped by that part of the people providentially sent ahead into the diaspora, who will create centres of Orthodoxy - churches of God all over the world. Christianity will then be revealed in all its heavenly beauty and fullness. Most of the peoples of the world will become Christian. And for a time a period of peace, prosperity and Christian living will come to the whole world...

"And then? Then, when the fullness of time has come, a great decline in faith will begin and everything foretold in the Holy Scriptures will occur. Antichrist will appear and the world will end."[196]

3. Monk Abel the Prophet (+1831). In a conversation with Tsar Paul I (+1801), after accurately prophesying the destinies of all the Tsars from Paul I

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[195] Quoted in Fomin , op. cit., p. 316.

[196] Archbishop Seraphim, "The Destinies of Russia", *The Orthodox Herald*, January-February, 1996 (in Russian); Fomin, op. cit., pp. 316-318; translated in Phillips, op. cit., pp. 299-300.

to Nicholas II: “What is impossible for man is possible for God. God delays with His help, but it is said that he will give it soon and will raise the horn of Russian salvation. And there will arise a great prince from your race in exile, who stands for the sons of his people. He will be a chosen one of God, and on his head will be blessing. He will be the only one comprehensible to all, the very heart of Russia will sense him. His appearance will be sovereign and radiant, and nobody will say: ‘The Tsar is here or there’, but all will say: ‘That’s him’. The will of the people will submit to the mercy of God, and he himself will confirm his calling… His name has occurred three times in Russian history. Two of the same name have already been on the throne, but not on the Tsar’s throne. But he will sit on the Tsar’s throne as the third. In him will be the salvation and happiness of the Russian realm.”

4. St. Seraphim of Sarov (+1833): “There will one day be a Tsar who will glorify me [Nicholas II glorified St. Seraphim in 1903], after which there will be a great disturbance in Russia, much blood will flow because they will rise up against this Tsar and autocracy, but God will magnify the Tsar”.

"More than half a century will pass. Then evildoers will raise their heads high. This will happen without fail: the Lord, seeing the impenitent evil of their hearts, will allow their enterprises for a short time. But their sickness will rebound upon their own heads, and the unrighteousness of their destructive plots will fall upon them. The Russian land will become red with rivers of blood...

“Before the birth of the Antichrist there will be a great, protracted war and a terrible revolution in Russia passing all bounds of human imagination, for the bloodletting will be most terrible: the rebellions of Ryazan, Pugachev and the French revolution will be nothing in comparison with what will take place in Russia. Many people who are faithful to the fatherland will perish, church property and the monasteries will be robbed; the Lord's churches will be desecrated; good people will be robbed of their riches and killed, rivers of Russian blood will flow... But the Lord will have mercy on Russia and will bring her along the path of great sufferings to glory."

"The Lord has revealed to me, wretched Seraphim, that there will be great woes on the Russian land, the Orthodox faith will be trampled on, and the hierarchs of the Church of God and other clergy will depart from the purity of Orthodoxy. And for this the Lord will severely punish them. I, wretched Seraphim, besought the Lord for three days and three nights that He would rather deprive me of the Kingdom of Heaven, but have mercy on them. But the Lord replied: ‘I will not have mercy on them; for they teach the teachings of men, and with their tongue honour Me, but their heart is far from Me.'"

"The Lord has ordained that I, poor Seraphim, am to live much longer than 100 years. By that time the Russian hierarchs will become so impious that they will not even believe in the most important dogma of the Faith of Christ – the resurrection of Christ and the general resurrection. That is why it will be

pleasing to the Lord God to take me from this very temporary life for a time and then, for the establishment of the dogma of the resurrection, to raise me, and my resurrection will be like the resurrection of the seven youths in the cave of Okhlon… After my resurrection I will go from Sarov to Diveyevo, when I will preach universal repentance. At this great miracle people will assemble in Diveyevo from all the ends of the earth, and there, preaching repentance to them, I will open four relics. Then Diveyevo will be a universal wonder, for from it the Lord God will send the Light of Salvation not only for Russia, but also for the whole world in the times of the Antichrist. I will open four relics and I myself will lie down between them as the fifth. But then will come the end of everything…"

"Everything will pass and come to an end. And the monasteries… will be destroyed, but at poor Seraphim's in Diveyevo the bloodless Sacrifice [the true Eucharist] will be celebrated until the very day of the coming of Christ."

"Constantinople and Jerusalem will be inhabited by the combined powers of Russia and the others. At the division of Turkey almost all will go to Russia, and Russia with the united forces of many other States will take Vienna, and about 7 million native Viennese will remain under the house of the Hapsburgs, and there the territory of the Austrian empire will be constructed. To France for her love for the Mother of God, the holy Madonna, will be given up to 17 million Frenchmen with its capital in the city of Rheims, while Paris will be completely destroyed… When the Russian Empire will receive 170 million into its dominion, we must expect the appearance of the Antichrist. 1) The Antichrist will be born in Russia between Petersburg and Moscow, in that great town which will be formed after the union of all the Slavic tribes with Russia. It will be the second capital of the Russian Kingdom and will be called 'Moscow-Petrograd', or 'the City of the End', which name will be given to it by the Lord God, the Holy Spirit, Who foresees everything from afar. 2) Before the birth of the Antichrist an Eighth Ecumenical Council must be convened of all the Churches under the One Head, Christ and under the one Protecting Veil of the Mother of God [according to St. Nilus the myrrh-gusher: "a last and eighth Ecumenical Council to deal with the disputes of heretics and separate the wheat from the chaff]. Its aim will be to unite and reunite all the holy Churches of Christ against the growing antichristian tendency under a single Head, Christ the Life-Giver, and under a single Protecting Veil of His Most Pure Mother, and to deliver to a final curse against the whole of Masonry and all the parties similar to it (under whatever names they may appear), the leaders of whom have one common aim: under the pretext of complete egalitarian earthly prosperity, and with the aid of people who have been made fanatical by them, to create anarchy in all states and to destroy Christianity throughout the world, and, finally, by the power of gold concentrated in their hands, to subdue the whole world to antichristianity in the person of a single autocratic, God-fighting tsar - one king over the whole world.

"Satan was the first revolutionary and thus fell from heaven. Between the teaching of his followers and the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ there is nothing in common, but a huge gulf. The Lord through the doing of the commandments given by Him calls mankind to heaven, where righteousness dwells. The spirit of darkness promises the building of paradise on earth."[197]

5. Elder Porphyrius of Glinsk (+1868): "In due course, faith will collapse in Russia. The brilliance of earthly glory will blind the mind. The word of truth will be defiled, but with regard to the Faith, some from among the people, unknown to the world, will come forward and restore what was scorned."[198]

6. Archimandrite Jonah (Miroshnichenko) (+1902) said: "You will see what will happen in fifty years' time: everyone will forsake the Law of God and will fall away from the faith, but then they will again come to their senses and turn back and live in a Christian manner."[199]

7. Elder Barnabas of Gethsemane Skete (+1906): "Persecutions against the faith will constantly increase. There will be unheard-of grief and darkness, and almost all the churches will be closed. But when it will seem that it is impossible to endure any longer, then deliverance will come. There will be a flowering. Churches will even begin to be built. But this will be a flowering before the end."[200]

8. St. John of Kronstadt (+1908): "I foresee the restoration of a powerful Russia, still stronger and mightier than before. On the bones of these martyrs, remember, as on a strong foundation, will the new Russia we built - according to the old model; strong in her faith in Christ God and in the Holy Trinity! And there will be, in accordance with the covenant of the holy Prince Vladimir, a single Church! Russian people have ceased to understand what Rus' is: it is the footstool of the Lord's Throne! The Russian person must understand this and thank God that he is Russian".[201]

"The Church will remain unshaken to the end of the age, and a Monarch of Russia, if he remains faithful to the Orthodox Church, will be established on the Throne of Russia until the end of the age."[202]

9. Elder Aristocles of Moscow (+1918): "An evil will shortly take Russia, and wherever this evil goes, rivers of blood will flow. It is not the Russian

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[197] St. Seraphim, from various sources, including a text supplied by Fr. Victor Potapov. See also *Literaturnaia Ucheba*, January-February, 1991, pp. 131-134 (in Russian).
[198] Elder Porphyrius, in Fr. Theodosius Clare, *The Glinsk Patericon*, Wildwood, CA: St. Xenia Skete, 1984, p. 129.
[199] Fomin, S. & Fomina, T. *Russia before the Second Coming*, Sergiev Posad, 1998, third edition, volume II, p. 331 (in Russian).
[200] Elder Barnabas, in Fr. Seraphim Rose, "The Future of Russia and the End of the World", *The Orthodox Word*, 1981, vol. 17, nos. 100-101, p. 211. Most of Fr. Seraphim's quotations were taken from *Orthodox Russia*, N 21, 1969.
[201] St. John of Krsontadt, in Fomin, op. cit., p. 249. Fomin and Fomina, vol. II, op. cit., p. 331.
[202] Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., p. 338.

soul, but an imposition on the Russian soul. It is not an ideology, nor a philosophy, but a spirit from hell. In the last days Germany will be divided. France will be just nothing. Italy will be judged by natural disasters. Britain will lose her empire and all her colonies and will come to almost total ruin, but will be saved by praying enthroned women. America will feed the world, but will finally collapse. Russia and China will destroy each other. Finally, Russia will be free and from her believers will go forth and turn many from the nations to God."[203]

"Now we are undergoing the times before the Antichrist. But Russia will yet be delivered. There will be much suffering, much torture. The whole of Russia will become a prison, and one must greatly entreat the Lord for forgiveness. One must repent of one's sins and fear to do even the least sin, but strive to do good, even the smallest. For even the wing of a fly has weight, and God's scales are exact. And when even the smallest of good in the cup tips the balance, then will God reveal His mercy upon Russia."

"The end will come through China. There will be an extraordinary outburst and a miracle of God will be manifested. And there will be an entirely different life, but all this will not be for long."

"God will remove all leaders, so that Russian people should look only at Him. Everyone will reject Russia, other states will renounce her, delivering her to herself – this is so that Russian people should hope on the help of the Lord. You will hear that in other countries disorders have begun similar to those in Russia. You will hear of war, and there will be wars. But wait until the Germans take up arms, for they are chosen as God's weapon to punish Russia – but also as a weapon of deliverance later. The Cross of Christ will shine over the whole world and our Homeland will be magnified and will become as a lighthouse in the darkness for all."[204]

10. Martyr-Eldress Duniushka of Siberia (+1918): "Brother will rise up against brother! They will destroy everything acquired by their ancestors…. They will sweep away religion, and -- most importantly -- there will be no master in the land!" The master in the land, of course, is the Tsar' – God's Anointed One! He cannot go anywhere. This trouble will come upon everyone and grind them up, as though in a meat-grinder… The war will end, and its end will turn the whole country upside-down. Insurgents will appear – leaders – who will incite the people against the Tsar'…. It will be terrible!

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[203] Schema-Monk Epiphanius (Chernov), personal communication.

[204] Elder Aristocles, in Rose, "The Future of Russia", op. cit.; Fomin & Fomina, op. cit., p. 435; "To the Memory of Abbess Barbara", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 33, no. 4, July-August, 1983, and I.K. Sursky, *Father John of Kronstadt*, Belgrade, 1941, p. 325 (in Russian). St. John of Kronstadt also prophesied that the deliverance of Russia would come from the East (Sursky, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 24), as did the Elder Theodosius of Minvody (Schema-Monk Epiphanius (Chernov), *The Catacomb Church in the Russian Land* (typescript, Mayford, 1980, in Russian)).

"Later, they will seize upon religion. They will sweep away that which has been gathered through the ages and assiduously preserved by our ancestors. But it will be impossible for them to root it out; the roots will remain – and, after many years, they'll give forth a most-beautiful bloom and fruit….

"The Tsar will leave the nation, which shouldn't be, but this has been foretold to him from Above. This is His destiny. There is no way that He can evade it. For this, He will receive a martyr's crown on earth, for which he will then receive an eternal crown, a Heavenly one…. He will be a prayerful Intercessor for the nation and the people, when the chastisement fallen upon dozens of generations for the harm done to God's Anointed One will reach an end…. The generations to come will bear the responsibility for this act on the part of their ancestors… The disaster in the land will disperse the people; they will be scattered to various countries, losing touch with one another. But, wherever Russians go, they will bring their culture and their religion.

"At the far end of Russia, there will be an enormous earthquake. The waters will break out of the ocean, flooding the continent, and many nations will perish. Many diseases beyond understanding will appear…. The face of the earth will change…. The people will comprehend their guilt; they will come to understand how far they have departed from God and from His teachings, and then they will begin to be reborn spiritually, gradually being cleansed physically, as well. People will become vegetarians. By that time, many animals will have vanished. The horse and the dog will only be seen in pictures; and later – the cow, the goat, and the sheep will disappear forever from our planet…. People will no longer be interested in politics, and the spiritual principle of each nation will predominate…

"Russia will be supreme in the world. Her name will be 'Holy Rus'. All sects and religions will pour into Orthodoxy…. But Orthodoxy, and -- essentially speaking -- religion, will draw closer to what it was in Apostolic times. . . . In those centuries to come, there will no longer be any tsars or kings. In 'Holy Rus',' a Prince will reign, who will come from the nation that gave us our religion [i.e., Byzantium]. He will be a supremely spiritual person, who will provide the opportunity for uplifting the moral fibre and the spiritual principles of the nation….

"During one of those centuries, Asia will bestir herself and try to penetrate into Europe, but her attempts will be futile. No one will ever overcome Holy Rus', and only through her will salvation come to the world."[205]

11. Hieromartyr Andronicus, Archbishop of Perm (+1918): "For its oath-breaking God has for the time being taken reason and will from the whole

[205] St. Duniushka, http://www.geocities.com/kitezhgrad/prophets/duniushka.html. Excerpted from the Diary of) V. Zarskaya-Altayeva.Translated into English by G. Spruksts, from the Russian text appearing in "The Russian Community Bulletin Of Seattle", vol. 16, No. 161, March 1986, pp. 3 - 6.

people, until they repent. It will be slow, but they will repent, at first gradually, but then they will completely recover their spiritual sight, they will feel strength and, like Ilya Muromets, will cast off this horror which has wrapped round the whole of our country… Perhaps I will not be alive, but I do not abandon my hope and confidence that Russia will be resurrected and return to God."[206]

12. Elder Anatolius (Potapov) of Optina (+1922) "There will be a storm. And the Russian ship will be destroyed. Yes, it will happen, but, you know, people can be saved on splinters and wreckage. Not all, not all will perish..." But he also prophesied that canonical unity would be restored: "A great miracle of God will be revealed. And all the splinters and wreckage will, by the will of God and His might, be gathered together and united, and the ship will be recreated in its beauty and will go along the path foreordained for it by God. That's how it will be, a miracle manifest to all..."[207]

13. Elder Alexis (Mechev) of Moscow (+1922): "When the time comes, God will sent the necessary people, who will do this work [the salvation of Russia] and will annihilate the Bolsheviks in the same way that a storm breaks the wood of a mast."[208]

14. Elder Nectarius of Optina (+1928): "Russia will arise, and materially she will not be wealthy. But in spirit she will be wealthy, and in Optina there will yet be seven luminaries, seven pillars."[209]

15. Martyr-Eldress Agatha of Belorussia (+1939): "The atheist Soviet power will vanish, and all its servants will perish. The True Orthodox Faith will triumph, and people will be baptised as at one time they were baptized under St. Vladimir."[210]

16. Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava (+1940): "The coming of the Antichrist draws nigh and is very near. But before the coming of the Antichrist Russia must yet be restored - to be sure, for a short time. And in Russia there must be a Tsar forechosen by the Lord Himself. He will be a man of burning faith, great mind and iron will. This much has been revealed about him...."[211] "He will not be a Romanov, but he will be of the Romanovs according to the maternal line."[212]

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[206] Archbishop Andronicus, *On the Church, On Russia*, Fryazino, 1997, p. 124; Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., p. 331.
[207] Elder Anatolius, in Rose, op. cit.; *The Russian Pilgrim*, N 7, 1993, p. 38 (in Russian); Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., p. 333.
[208] Elder Alexis, in Sursky, op. cit., p. 196;); Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., p. 332..
[209] Elder Nectarius, in Rose, op. cit.
[210] Martyr-Eldress Agatha, in I.M. Andreyev, op. cit., pp. 422-423.
[211] Fomin & Fomina, op. cit., p. 436.
[212] Archbishop Theophanes, in Schema-Monk Epiphanius (Chernov), personal communication; Fomin & Fomina, op. cit., p. 436.

"I do not speak from myself. But that which I have heard from the God-inspired elders, that I have passed on... The Lord will have mercy on Russia for the sake of the small remnant of true believers. In Russia, the elders said, in accordance with the will of the people, the Monarchy, Autocratic power, will be re-established. The Lord has forechosen the future Tsar. He will be a man of fiery faith, having the mind of a genius and a will of iron. First of all he will introduce order in the Orthodox Church, removing all the untrue, heretical and lukewarm hierarchs. And many, very many - with few exceptions, all - will be deposed, and new, true, unshakeable hierarchs will take their place. He will be of the family of the Romanovs according to the female line. Russia will be a powerful state, but only for 'a short time'... And then the Antichrist will come into the world, with all the horrors of the end as described in the Apocalypse."[213]

17. Hieroschemamonk Seraphim (Vyritsky) of Moscow (+1942): "When the East will get stronger, everything will become shaky. Numbers are on their side. But not only that: they have sober workers and industrious people, while there is such drunkenness with us… There will come a time when Russia will be torn into pieces. At first they will divide it, and then they will begin to steal its wealth. The West will do everything to help the destruction of Russia and for a time will give its eastern part to China. The Far East will fall into the hands of Japan, and Siberia – to the Chinese, who will begin to move into Russia, marry Russian women and in the end by cunning and craftiness will seize the territory of Siberia as far as the Urals. But when China will want to go further, the West will resist and will not allow it… The East will be baptised in Russia. The whole heavenly world, together with those on earth, understand this, and pray for the enlightenment of the East."

18. Elder Theodosius (Kashin) of Minvody (+1948) said, shortly after the outbreak of war in 1941: "Do you really think that that was the war (1941-45)?! The war is still to come. It will begin from the east. And then from all sides, like locusts, the enemies will spread over Russia... That will be the war!"

"During that memorable conversation," wrote Schema-Archimandrite Seraphim (Tyapochkin), "a woman from a Siberian town was present. The elder said to her: 'You will receive a martyr's crown from the hands of the Chinese in your town's stadium, where they will drive the Christians who live there and those who do not agree with their rule. This was the reply to her doubts with regard to the words of the elder that practically the whole of Siberia will be captured by the Chinese. The elder told what had been revealed to him about the future of Russia, he did not name dates, he only emphasized that the time for the accomplishment of his words was in the hands of God, and much depended on how the spiritual life of the Russian Church would develop, insofar as the strength of faith in God among the Russian people would correspond to the believers' struggles in prayer… The

[213] Archbishop Theophanes, in Betts, Marchenko, op. cit., pp. 111-112; Fomin & Fomina, op. cit., p. 436.

elder said that the collapse of Russia, in spite of her apparent strength and the cruelty of the authorities, would take place very quickly. At first the Slavic peoples will be split off, then the Union republics will fall away: the Baltic, Central Asia and Caucasian republics and Moldavia. After this central power in Russia will weaken still more, so that autonomous republics and regions will begin to separate themselves. Then a great collapse will take place: the power of the Centre will cease to be recognized de facto by the autonomous regions, which will try to live independently and will no longer pay any attention to orders from Moscow. The greatest tragedy will be the seizure of Siberia by China. This will not take place through military means: in consequence of the weakening of the authorities and the open frontiers, masses of Chinese will move into Siberia, will snap up property, enterprises and flats. By means of bribery, intimidation and agreements with the authorities, they will gradually take control of the economic life of the towns. Everything will take place in such a way that one morning the Russians living in Siberia will wake up… in a Chinese state. The destiny of those who remain there will be tragic, but not hopeless. The Chinese will deal cruelly with every attempt at resistance. (That was why the elder prophesied a martyric end in the stadium of the Siberian town for many Orthodox and patriots of the Homeland.) The West will assist this creeping conquest of our land and in every way support the military and economic might of China out of hatred for Russia. But then they will see the danger for themselves, and when the Chinese try to conquer the Urals, this time by military might, and go even further, they will by all means hinder this and will even be able to help Russia in deflecting the invasion from the East. Russia must stand her ground in this battle; after sufferings and complete impoverishment she will find in herself the strength to recover. And the coming regeneration will begin in the lands conquered by the enemies, in the midst of Russians left in the former republics of the Union. There Russian people will realise what they have lost, will recognise themselves to be citizens of that Fatherland which is still alive, and will want to help her rise from the ashes. Many Russians living abroad will begin to help the re-establishment of life in Russia… Many of those who are able to flee from persecutions will return to the immemorial Russian lands so as to fill up the abandoned villages, till the neglected fields and use the mineral resources that remain untapped. The Lord will send help, and, in spite of the fact that the country will have lost its main seams of raw materials, they will find the oil and gas without which a contemporary economy cannot work, in Russia. The elder said that the Lord would permit the loss of huge territories given to Russia because we ourselves were not able to use them worthily, but only spoiled and polluted them…

"But the Lord will leave in Russia's possession those lands which became the cradle of the Russian people and were the base of the Great Russian state. This is the territory of the Great Muscovite Principality of the 16th century with outlets to the Black, Caspian and North seas. Russia will not be rich, but still she will be able to feed herself and force others to reckon with her. To the question: "What will happen to Ukraine and Belorussia?" the elder replied that everything is in the hands of God. Those among those people who are

against union with Russia – even if they consider themselves to be believers – will become servants of the devil. The Slavic peoples have one destiny, and the monastic Fathers of the Kiev Caves [Lavra] will yet utter their weighty word – they together with the choir of the new martyrs of Russia will by their prayers obtain a new Union of the three brother peoples. They posed one more question to him – on the possibility of the restoration of a monarchy in Russia. The elder replied that this restoration must be earned. It exists as a possibility, but not as something pre-determined. If we are worthy, the Russian people will elect a Tsar, but this will become possible before the very enthronement of the Antichrist or even after it – for a very short time."[214]

10.3-4. And he cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth. And when he cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me: Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

Again, we are reminded of Daniel: **And thou, Daniel, close the words, and seal the book to the time of the end; until many are taught, and knowledge is increased** (12.4). Here the sealing of the prophecy of the seven thunders may signify the postponement of the final judgement of the world, and a brief period of peace and prosperity, as indicated by the prophets quoted above.

10.5-6. And the angel whom I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by Him Who liveth unto the ages of ages, Who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and things which are therein, that there should be time no longer.

The doctrine of God the Creator is emphasized here after the destruction of that generation of men who, through the evil doctrine of Darwinism, rejected the existence of the Creator, Who is **the Beginning of every beginning** (I Chronicles 29.12). And in general the apostasy of the Christian world has gone so far that the re-conversion of the world must begin with this primary doctrine, a reaffirmation of the teaching that **in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth** (Genesis 1.1).

As the Church proclaims on the Sunday of Orthodoxy: "To those who deny the existence of God and affirm that this world is self-existent, and everything in it arose by chance and not by the Providence of God, **anathema, anathema, anathema**."

"**There should be time no longer**, i.e. the usual cycle of the elements of the world is to cease; there will be no time as measured by the sun and eternity will begin." (Archbishop Averky)

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[214] Fomin & Fomina, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 473-473.

"For time," writes St. John of Damascus, "will not be counted by days and nights even after the resurrection, but there will rather be one day with no evening, wherein the Sun of Righteousness will shine brightly on the righteous, but for the sinful there will be night profound and limitless."[215]

"Here it is important that the angel swore **by Him Who liveth unto the ages of ages**, i.e., by God Himself. Consequently those sectarians are wrong who consider that no oath whatsoever is to be allowed." (Archbishop Averky).

10.7. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets.

"That is, there shall soon begin the last of the seven epochs of the existence of the world and the seventh angel shall trumpet. Then will come to an end **the mystery of God** prophesied by our prophets, that is, the end of the world and everything that is to occur in connection with it." (Archbishop Averky)

Or there will begin the last of the seven parts of the last period in the world's history, that period which began with the First World War and the Russian revolution, and will end with the reign of the personal Antichrist.

According to Th. Yakovlev, the **mystery** here referred to "has now been revealed, being that which the apostles often referred to (Ephesians 1.8, 3.6) – the conversion of the Gentiles, which took place swiftly throughout the world after the destruction of Roman lordship and superstition."[216] However, if we are right in referring this prophecy to a much later date, to the time of the Third World War and its aftermath, then the **mystery** can still refer to the conversion of the Gentiles, but this time *truly* throughout the *whole* world, far beyond the limits of the Roman empire. For the angelic voice that ends the war, as we have seen, declares: **And the Gospel will be preached throughout the world.**

10.8-11. And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said: Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And went unto the angel, and said unto him: Give me the little book. And he said unto me: Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth as sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey. And as soon as I had

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[215] St. Damascene, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, II, 1. Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) writes: "Eternal life should be understood in this sense, that there, in the words of the Apocalypse, **there should be time no longer**, that is, the surrounding conditions and circumstances will not change." (in Archbishop Nicon (Rklitsky), *The Life and Works of his Beatitude Anthony, Metropolitan of Kiev and Galich*, Montreal, 1965, volume V, p. 135 (in Russian)).

[216] Yakovlev, in Barsov, op. cit., p. 134.

eaten it, my belly was bitter. And he said unto me: thou must prophesy again before peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.

"Here is indicated the fact that St. John has received the prophetic gift just as the Old Testament prophets received it. For example, the holy Prophet Ezekiel, to whom it was likewise commanded to eat a scroll of a book before he was sent by the Lord to preach to the house of Israel (Ezekiel 2.8-10, 3.1-4).

"The sweetness and bitterness in the explanation of St. Andrew signify the following: 'Sweet for you.' he says, 'is the knowledge of the future. At the same time it is bitter for the belly, i.e. the heart, the dwelling place of the food of the Word because of compassion for those who will have to endure the punishments sent down by God's decrees. This is also to be interpreted in another way inasmuch as the holy evangelist had not experienced evil deeds; by this swallowing of the book which contained the deeds of the impious is indicated to him that at the beginning of sin there is sweetness, and after the accomplishment, bitterness, by reason of revenge and reward.' (St. Andrew of Caesarea) The compassionate heart of the apostle could not but feel the whole bitterness of the grief which awaits sinful mankind. In conclusion, St. John received the command to prophesy." (Archbishop Averky)

The fact that St. John is told that he **must prophesy before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings** may indicate that in the very last period of world history which is about to be unfolded in the Apocalypse - the universal preaching of the Gospel, followed by the reign of the personal Antichrist, described in chapter 11 - St. John himself will play an important role alongside the two witnesses. For there is a tradition, based, it would seem, on the mystery surrounding his death[217] and burial, after which no body was found[218], that St. John will be resurrected from the dead to preach in the flesh against the Antichrist, and then be killed by him.

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[217] **Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; who also leaned on His breast at supper, and said: Lord, who is he that betrayeth thee? Peter, seeing him, saith to Jesus: Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him: If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren that that disciple should not die. Yet Jesus said not unto him: he shall not die; but: if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?** (John 21.20-23). John himself, it should be noted, is rather non-committal about the tradition, pointing out only that the Lord did not expressly say that he would not die. We are left with the impression that there is some mystery here, which John either did not know, or did not wish to reveal...

[218] Thus St. Ambrose writes: "Of his [John's] death some have doubted: of his passage through the fire [which guards Paradise] none can doubt, because he is in Paradise, and is not separated from Christ" (*On Psalm 118*, 20, 11). Again, St. Gregory of Tours writes: "John, Apostle and Evangelist, after having fulfilled his course, both of meritorious conflict and most salutory preaching, went down alive into the grave, and ordered that he should be covered with earth" (*On Miracles*, book 1). He adds that manna was said to flow from his grave. St. Demetrius of Rostov writes: "When the apostle was over 100 years old, he left the house of Domnas with his disciples and, going to a certain place, ordered them to sit there. It was already near to morning, and he, departing about a stone-throw's distance, began to pray. Then, when his disciples, in accordance with his will, had dug out for him a grave in the shape of a cross, he ordered Prochorus to go to Jerusalem and stay there until his death.

"For God gave three laws to the human race: the natural law, which God commanded Adam in Paradise, and instilled as innate into the nature of each one of us, and the written law, which He gave to the Jews on Sinai through Moses, and the Gospel law, which our Lord Jesus Christ gave through the holy Apostles in Jerusalem. In the last times witnesses of these laws must appear. Enoch will come as the witness of the natural law, and Elijah - of the Mosaic law, and the present Evangelist [John] - of the Gospel law. [John] will be killed together with Enoch and Elijah in the time of the Antichrist." (Patriarch Anthimus)[219]

Another possibility is that John has already been resurrected, not like Lazarus in a corrupt body again, but like the Mother of God in an incorrupt body.[220]

Anna Ilyinskaya writes: "A spiritual son of the elder Fr. Alexis Mechev, Bishop Stefan (Nikitin), was convinced that before the end of history the Church would be ruled by the Apostle John, who is preserved in some unattainable place by the Lord for his last service. The same prophecy was made by the Optina Elder Nectarius… His spiritual daughter, the nun Nectaria (Kontsevich) asked: 'Batyushka, they say that John the Theologian will come.' He replied: 'That will all take place, but this is a great mystery…'"[221]

Having given further instructions to his disciples and kissed them, the apostle said: 'Take the earth, my mother, and cover me with it.' And his disciples kissed him and covered him to the knees, and when he again kissed them, they covered him even to the neck, and having placed a veil on his face, kissed him again and with great weeping covered him up completely. Hearing about this, the brothers came from the city and dug up the grave, but found nothing there, and they wept greatly. Then, having prayed, they returned to the city. And every year, on the eighth day of the month of May, a fragrant myrrh appeared from the tomb and by the prayers of the holy apostle gave healings to the sick, to the glory of God glorified in Trinity to the ages of ages. Amen." (*Lives of the Saints*, Moscow, 1902, September, p. 590). And again, his life of the Martyr Hermione: "The holy Apostle Philip, who baptised the servant of the Ethiopian Queen Candace, had four daughters, about whom the Evangelist Luke remarks that they were prophetesses and virgins. Of them Hermione and Eutychia set off for Asia, seeking the holy John the Theologian, but did not find him, for the Lord had taken him, as once he took Enoch and Elijah." (op. cit., p. 113).

[219] St. Hippolytus also says that John will be killed by the Antichrist together with Enoch and Elijah. See *Discourse on the End of the World, and on Antichrist, and on the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*, 21. For further patristic references to St. John's preaching with Enoch and Elijah at the end of the world, see Marchevsky, op. cit., pp. 124-125 and W. Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend*, London: Hutchinson, 1895, and Rev. P. Huchede, *History of Antichrist*, Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1968, pp. 31-32.

[220] For references, see http://www.omolenko.com/texts/taina.htm (in Russian).

[221] Ilyinskaya, *The Mystery of Elder Theodosius*, Moscow, 1997, p. 198 (in Russian). Again, Elder Theodosius (Kashin) of Minvody said that "in the last times the Apostle of love – that was what his disciples called John the Theologian – will preach in the Caucasus" (Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., vol. II, p. 521).

7. The Seventh Seal: The Two Witnesses

11.1-2. And there was given me a reed like unto a rod. And the angel stood, saying: Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles; and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

"The temple of the living God is the Church in which the rational sacrifices are offered by us. The court **which is without** is the society of unbelievers and Jews who are unworthy of the angelic measuring (i.e. the definition of the degree of their moral perfection and corresponding blessedness) because of their impiety." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

"The treading underfoot of the Holy City, Jerusalem, or the Ecumenical Church, for the course of forty-two months signifies that at the time of the coming of the Antichrist the faithful will be persecuted for the course of three and a half years.

"Some interpreters suppose that this measurement of the temple signifies the speedy destruction of the Old Testament temple in Jerusalem on the site of which there is to be raised a New Testament Christian Church, just like a similar measurement of the temple by means of a reed was given in a vision to the Prophet Ezekiel (chapters 40-45), signifying the restoration of the destroyed temple. Others consider that the inner court which was measured by the apostle signifies **the Church of the first-born in heaven** (Hebrews 12.23), the heavenly sanctuary; and that the outer court left without measurement is the Church of Christ on earth which must endure persecution, at first from the pagans, and then, in the last times, from the Antichrist. The miserable condition of the earthly Church is limited, however, to this period of forty-two months. Some interpreters have seen the fulfilment of the prophecy of forty-two months in the persecution of Diocletian, which was distinguished by its great cruelty and which lasted from February 23rd, 305 to July 25th, 308, which is about three and a half years. The persecution touches only the outward court, that is, the external aspect of the life of Christians, whose property will be taken away. They will be subjected to tortures, while the inner sanctuary of their souls will remain untouched." (Archbishop Averky)

The period three and a half years has great significance in the history of the people of God. Thus the holy Prophet Elijah spent three and a half years in the wilderness, fleeing from Jezebel. And in the time of the Maccabees the temple was desecrated for three and a half years by Antiochus Epiphanes. And "Jesus Himself spent three and a half years in Egypt, fleeing from Herod" (Patriarch Anthimus). And the Christians fled to Pella for three and a half years during the Romans' siege of Jerusalem in 66-70 A.D. And the persecution of Diocletian lasted for three and a half years. And the first period of persecution of the Russian Church by the Soviet Antichrist lasted for about

three and a half years, from October, 1917 to March, 1921, when the last major rebellion against Soviet rule, by the sailors of Kronstadt, was crushed. Finally, the persecution of the personal Antichrist will last for three and a half years.

St, Gregory the Great writes: "**And He spoke to me and said to me: Go in and shut thyself up in the midst of thy house** (Ezekiel 3.24). Why is it that the Prophet is led from the midst of the people of Israel to the plain, and afterward called from the plain to his house unless that the grace of preaching was removed from the people of the Jews and scattered among the breadth of the Gentiles? Nevertheless at the end of the world when the Jews return to the Faith, as the Prophet is led back to his house, so preaching will again have its habitation among his people, the preaching which now shines on the plain among the diverse nations. For it is written: **Until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in, and so all Israel should be saved** (Romans 11.25-26). Because it is also said through another Prophet: **If the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved** (Es. 10.22, Romans 9.27). Therefore the Prophet may go out from the midst of the people to the plain, and return from the plain to the house, so that the preaching which happened in Judea may go out to the nations, and when the nations are replete with the Faith the spiritual Judea may go out to receive the gifts of doctrine which she lost. Then the Prophet is commanded to be shut in his house, because in the time of Antichrist the converted mass of the Jews will be restrained by harsh tribulation by the nations which have remained in infidelity. Thus it is written: **But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles; and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months** (Revelation 11.2)."[222]

This last period in the history of the Church, the reign of the personal Antichrist, will be prepared by a drastic decline in Christian morality throughout the world. Thus when "iniquity shall have multiplied, and all creatures become defiled," says St. Ephraim, "Divine Justice shall appear, and shall wholly destroy the people, and, coming from perdition, the man of iniquity shall be revealed upon the earth, the seducer of men and disturber of the whole earth."[223]

St. Andrew the Fool-for-Christ writes: "When his reign [that of the last Orthodox emperor] has ended, **the beginning of sorrows** will set in. Then the son of iniquity will arise and reign in this city for three and a half years, and cause such wickedness to be done as has not been committed since the beginning of the world. He will decree that fathers should lie with their daughters and mothers with their sons and brothers with their sisters, and whoever refuses to do so will be punished with death. The stench and abomination will rise up before the Lord, Who will be bitterly angered, and

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[222] St. Gregory, *Homilies on Ezekiel*, book I, 12, 6; translated by Theodosia Gray, Etna, Ca.: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1990, p. 143.
[223] St. Ephraim, op. cit.

He will command His thunder and lightning to smite the earth. Many cities will be burned down, and men will be paralysed with fear."[224]

Monasticism will be especially persecuted, as we can see in the following prophecy of St. Moses the Egyptian which covers the whole period from the collective Antichrist to the personal Antichrist: "After this the servant of God Moses saw that a cloud and storm and dark mist of most terrible temptations fell upon the monks from the direction of the north [Russia?], and that the monks were persecuted, together with the monastic schema, by a ruinous combination of heresies, and many were forced to cast aside the schema and marry. Then the few strugglers who have been proved as gold and silver in the furnace will triumph in great sorrow and distress of persecutions. And as many as will appear proved and victorious in such terrible temptations will be magnified and glorified and honoured by God more than those who bore the heat of the day and the burning and frost of the night. After this the servant of God Moses saw that that storm of sorrows and temptations had passed, together with the distress of terrible heresies, and it became peaceful and calm. Again, however, after the passing of some years the angelic order of the monks will be neglected, and temptations will arise even fiercer and more numerous than the first. And he saw that the monks impiously had intercourse with the nuns, and that tyranny was mixed with evil desire so that even the unwilling were corrupted. And the priests were defiled by fornication, and their wives committed adultery, as they themselves did with other women. Then the wrath of God will come and consume that wicked generation, and it will go into the eternal fire."[225]

Again, Abba Ischyrion was asked by his monks: "What have we accomplished?" "We have fulfilled the commandments of God," replied Ischyrion. "And what will those who come after us accomplish?" "They will accomplish what we have accomplished, but only half as much as we." "And those after them?" "Those in the last days will have no monastic training, but such assaults and temptations will come upon them that they will, through these trials, be revealed in the Kingdom of God as greater than us and than our fathers."[226]

St. Niphon of Constantia said: "In the last times those who will serve God in truth will successfully hide themselves from people and will not perform wonders and signs in their midst as at the present time, but will go on the path of activity mixed with humility, and in the Kingdom of Heaven they will be greater than the Fathers who have been glorified with signs." "My son! There will not be lacking holy men until the end of time! But in the last days they will conceal themselves from people and will please God in such humility that they will be higher in the Kingdom of Heaven that the first

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[224] St. Andrew, translated by Cyril Mango, *Byzantium*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980, p. 209.
[225] St. Moses, in Bishop Gregory, op. cit.; Panagopoulos, op. cit.
[226] Abba Ischyrion, translated in Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986, part one, February 5.

wonderworking fathers. And their reward will be so great because in those days there will be nobody performing miracles before their eyes, and people will of themselves receive zeal and the fear of God in their hearts, for at that time the hierarchical rank will be unskilled and will not love wisdom and reason, and will worry only about gain. The monks will be similar to them because of their possession of great properties; from vainglory their eyes will be darkened, and those who love God with all their heart will be despised by them; the love of money will reign in them with all its strength. But woe to the monks who love gold: they will not see the Face of God! If the monks and novices who lend money on interest do not depart from this evil quickly, they will be called usurers here and their prayer will not be accepted, and their fasting will be useless, and the offering of sacrifices to God and alms will all be counted as abomination and defilement. They will go by the broad path..."[227]

St. Narses of Armenia says: "Then if there be grinding two in one mill, the one shall be taken and the other left. And there shall shoot forth the leaf of the fig tree, which is the Antichrist. The branches shooting up are his ministers."[228]

11.3-6. And I will give power unto My two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three score days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies. And if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy, and have power over waters, to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.

According to St. Hippolytus of Rome and the constant tradition of the Church, these two **witnesses**, or **olive trees** or **candlesticks** are the Prophets Enoch and Elijah. "For when Enoch and Elijah preach," writes St. Gregory the Great, "the two who are named the **two olive trees** by Zechariah (4.3), and the **two candlesticks** by John, - many of the Jews who then remain faithless will return to recognition of the truth, as it is said of Elijah: **Elijah shall come and restore all things** (Matthew 17.11)."[229] Or the two olives trees are the Old and the New Testaments (The Venerable Bede).

I will send you Elijah the Tishbite, who will restore the heart of the father to the son, lest I come and utterly smite the earth (Malachi 4.5,6)... "And He also teaches with all this the reason for his coming. And what is this reason? That when He has come, he may persuade the Jews to believe in Christ, so they may not all utterly perish at His coming... Hence the extreme

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[227] St. Niphon, in Fomin, op. cit., pp. 268-269.
[228] St. Narses, in Bousset, op. cit., p. 255.
[229] St. Gregory, *Homilies on Ezekiel*.

accuracy of the expression: He did not say **He will restore the heart of the son to the father**, but **of the father to the son**. For the Jews being father to the apostles, His meaning is that He will restore to the doctrines of their sons, that is, of the apostles, the hearts of the fathers, that is, the Jewish people's mind."[230]

"For the whole course of this time, 1260 days, two witnesses of God will preach repentance to men and convert them from the deception of the Antichrist. By these two witnesses all the holy fathers and teachers of the Church almost unanimously understand the Old Testament righteous ones Enoch and Elijah, who were taken alive into heaven. During their preaching, while possessing authority and power over the elements in order to chastise the impious and bring them to their sense, they themselves will be unharmed." (Archbishop Averky)

And Enoch walked with God, and he was not; for God took him (Genesis 5.24). **By faith Enoch was translated, that he should not see death** (Hebrews 11.5). **And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven** (IV Kings 2.11).

"O wondrous Grace of God! For He offers a treatment equal in power to the wound. Just as the false Christ will possess every diabolical activity, and all his false signs and miracles will be more glorious than all sorcerers and deceivers, so also will God arm these saints with the power of true signs and miracles, so that by offering truth and light they may overthrow the lie and darkness and convert the deceived either by the word of teaching or by the blows of chastisement (drought, fire, changes in the elements, and so forth), and may expose the deceiver himself without themselves suffering in the least either through him or others." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

"Enoch will be the evangelist of the pagans, while Elijah the Thesbite – of the Jews. The apostolic preaching of the Evangelist John will be required for the sake of the elect, for the restoration of the lost meaning of the Christian teaching, perverted by the interpretations of the rationalists among the Christians… There remains no one Gospel commandment which, like the Talmudists in relation to the law of Moses, the Protestants did not have to change, either by narrowing or by broadening its meaning to an unrecognisable degree… Corresponding to the success of the preaching of Elijah the Thesbite amidst the Jews, it must be supposed that the preaching of Enoch among the pagans and the preaching of John the Theologian among the Christians will have great success." (St. John of Kronstadt).

11.7-8. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

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[230] St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 57 on Matthew*, 1.

"During their preaching activity, endowed with power and authority over the elements for the punishment and instruction of the impious, they will themselves be invulnerable. And only at the end of their mission, after a period of three and a half years, **the beast that ascendeth from the bottomless pit** (i.e. the Antichrist) will be allowed by God to kill the preachers, and their corpses will be thrown into the streets of the great city, **which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified**, that is, apparently, the city of Jerusalem where the Antichrist will found his kingdom, giving himself out to be the Messiah who was promised by the prophets." (Archbishop Averky)

"In this city he will establish his kingdom and royal throne in the likeness of David... so as to prove that he is Christ who fulfils the prophet's words: **I shall restore the fallen tabernacle of David and raise up that which was fallen** (Amos 9.11). These words the Jews will accept and refer to his coming." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

St. Ephraim writes: "When the son of perdition has drawn to his purpose the whole world, Enoch and Elijah shall be sent to refute the evil one by a question filled with mildness. Coming to him, these holy men, that they may expose the son of perdition before the multitudes round about him, will say: 'If you are God, show us what we now ask of you. In what place do the men of old, Enoch and Elijah, lie hidden?' Then the evil one will at once answer the holy men: 'If I wish to seek for them in heaven, or in the depths of the sea, every abode lies open to me. There is no other God but me, and I can do all things in heaven and on earth.' They shall answer the son of perdition: 'If you are God, call the dead, and they will rise up. For it is written in the books of the prophets, and also by the apostles, that Christ, when He shall appear, will raise the dead from their tombs. If you do not show us this, we shall conclude that He Who was crucified is greater than you; for He raised the dead, and was Himself raised to heaven in great glory.' In that moment the evil one, angered against the saints, seizing his sword, will most abominably sever the necks of the just men."[231]

11.9-10. And they of the kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their bodies three days and a half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts to one another; because these two prophets tormented those that dwelt on the earth.

"These people will be deceived by the false miracles of the Antichrist who, with the cooperation of the devil, will be the most glorious of all sorcerers and deceivers; he will not allow the prophets to be given over to burial, and will

[231] St. Ephraim, op. cit., p. 357. But St. Victorinus (*Commentary on the Apocalypse*) says that "the raising of the dead to life is mentioned among the wonders wrought by this false prophet".

rejoice in their death, **because these two prophets tormented those that dwelt on the earth**, arousing their consciences." (Archbishop Averky)

St. Narses of Armenia says: "There is rejoicing among the false prophets, when they behold the death of the true prophets. Then doth the great dragon himself, the son of perdition, cry aloud in the hearing of all, and say: Behold ye my mighty power. Since for many a year they had been immortal, and no others can be rescued from my hands. And no one hath been able to overcome my might. And yet more doth his wickedness flame up in the land, whom the Lord Jesus shall utterly destroy with the breath of His mouth."[232]

This world-wide rejoicing over the deaths of the prophets suggests a worldwide form of communications, perhaps television, relaying these events live to millions.[233]

St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher writes: "After the murder of Enoch and Elijah, Antichrist will release his most wicked followers (he will free the evil spirits, which he had restrained until now). These offspring or spirits of evil are adultery, fornication, homosexuality, murder, plundering, robbery, lies, tortures, buying and selling of people, and the buying of boys and girls for fornication with them, like unto the dogs in the streets. Antichrist will command these evil spirits who obey him to drive people into doing ten times as much evil as formerly."[234]

The men of that time will be deceived, not because they had no opportunity to come to a knowledge of the truth, but, on the contrary, because they flew in the face of the truth as it was openly revealed to them.

For, as the Apostle Paul says: **Then shall that wicked man be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His Coming; even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness** (II Thessalonians 2.8-12).

Blessed Theodoretus writes: "The Antichrist will not rule over all, but only over those who are worthy of perdition, who, even if he had not come, would still have deprived themselves of salvation."[235] And St. John of Damascus writes that the Antichrist will lure to himself "those who have a weak and feeble mind; he will seduce and tear them away from the living God."[236] However, as St. Ephraim says, "many people will be found pleasing to God,

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[232] St. Narses, in Bousset, op. cit., p. 257.
[233] Grant Jeffrey, *The Signature of God*, Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale Publishing, 1996, p. 196.
[234] St. Nilus, in Archimandrite Panteleimon, op. cit., p. 84.
[235] Blessed Theodoretus, *Commentary on II Thessalonians*.
[236] St. Damascene, *Oration on the Transfiguration of the Lord*.

for whom it will be possible, in the mountains and desert places, to save themselves by much prayer... For God, seeing their many tears and sincere faith, will have mercy on them, as a tender Father, and will keep them."[237]

St. Seraphim of Sarov said of the temptations facing the faithful Christians of these last times: "When this age comes to an end, at first the Antichrist will remove the crosses from the churches and destroy the monasteries... Then life will be short. The angels will scarcely be able to collect the souls... In the days of that great sorrow of which it is said that no flesh could be saved unless, for the sake of the elect, those days will be cut short - in those days the remnant of the faithful are to experience in themselves something like that which was experienced by the Lord Himself when He, hanging on the Cross, being perfect God and perfect Man, felt Himself so forsaken by His Divinity that He cried out to Him: **My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?** The last Christians also will experience in themselves a similar abandonment of humanity by the grace of God, but only for a very short time, after the passing of which the Lord will not delay immediately to appear in all His glory, and all the holy angels with Him. And then will be performed in all its fullness everything foreordained from the ages in the pre-eternal counsel of the Holy Trinity."[238]

11.11-12. And after three days and a half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon those who saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven, saying unto them: Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.

"The evil joy of the impious will be not be long in duration. In three and a half days the holy prophets will be brought to life by God and raised up to heaven." (Archbishop Averky)

11.13. And the same hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand; and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

"At the same time a great earthquake will take place, a tenth part of the city will be destroyed and seven thousand men will perish, and the remained being seized with fear will send up glory to the God of heaven. Thus a decisive blow will be given to the work of the Antichrist." (Archbishop Averky)

The figure "seven thousand" recalls the **seven thousand who have not bowed their knees to Baal** in the time of the Prophet Elijah's first coming to earth (III Kings 19.18).

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[237] St. Ephraim, *Oration on the Coming of the Lord*.
[238] St. Seraphim, in Fomin, op. cit., p. 342.

St. Hippolytus teaches that Enoch and Elijah will preach for three-and-a-half years and will be killed in the middle of the Antichrist's seven-year reign. "As also it was announced to Daniel: **And one week shall establish the covenant with many; and in the midst of the week My sacrifice and drink-offering shall be taken away** (9.27) - that the one week [of years] might be shown to be divided into two. The two witnesses, then, shall preach three years and a half; and the Antichrist shall wage war against the saints during the rest of the week, and desolate the world."[239]

And on the holy place shall be the abomination of desolations; and at the end of time an end shall be put to the desolation... (Daniel 9.27)

The abomination of desolation, according to St. Hippolytus, is the Antichrist, "who announces desolation to the world"; while the **sacrifice** and **oblation** are that "which are now offered to God in every place by the nations" - in other words, the sacrament of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.[240] Thus, according to the same Father, "the honourable Body and Blood of Christ will not be offered in those days. Public Divine services will be discontinued."[241] This may be **the second woe**:

11.14. The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

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[239] St. Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*, 30.

[240] St. Hippolytus, op. cit., 22. There is a tradition that the last Divine Liturgy will be celebrated on Mount Athos. See Marchevsky, op. cit., p. 157 and note.

[241] St. Hippolytus, in Fomin, op. cit., p. 268. However, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, commenting on I Corinthians 11.26, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come", disputes this interpretation: "Here we find an important truth in the small word 'till'. In order better to understand this, I direct the speech of the Apostle to the question will Christians eat the mystical Bread and drink of the Chalice of the Lord? We find the answer in the words of the Apostle: 'till He come,' i.e., the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ will take place without interruption in the true Church of Christ till the very second coming of Christ, or till the end of time, which has the same meaning. Since this cannot be without the grace of the priesthood, and the grace of the priesthood cannot exist without the grace of an hierarchy, then clearly the grace of the office of bishop, according to the foresight of the Apostle, will be in the Church in all times and uninterrupted channels will flow even up to the bring of the approach of the kingdom of glory." After quoting this passage, Hieromonk Ignaty (Trepatschko) writes: "The ancient Fathers of the Church express the same opinion. St. John Chrysostom says: 'Showing that the Holy Eucharist will be till the end of the world, the Apostle Paul said: "till He comes". St. John of Damascus and St. Ephraim the Syrian concur with this view" ("The Church of Christ in the Time of the Antichrist", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 41, no. 2, March-April, 1991, p. 40). And St. Seraphim of Sarov prophesied: "The monasteries will be destroyed, but at poor Seraphim's in Diveyevo until the very day of the Comng of Christ the bloodless Sacrifice will be performed" (Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., vol.1, p. 318). Hieromartyr Nicon of Optina writes: "'I will build My Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it', it says in the Gospel. The Apostle says that the breaking of bread, that is, the sacrament of the Eucharist, will be celebrated until the Second Coming of the Lord. St. Ephraim the Syrian says that there will come a time when the Bloodless Sacrifice will cease. There would appear to be a contradiction here. But no, one must understand it in this way: there will be no open serving in church, but the sacrament of the Eucharist itself will continue until the Second Coming of the Saviour" (*Nadezhda*, 8, 1981, Frankfurt, p. 233 (in Russian)).

The three woes may correspond to the three phases of God's judgement in the seventh seal: the Third World War, the reign of the personal Antichrist, and the last and most terrible judgement when Christ Himself will come in glory.

However, two passages from Daniel suggest that there is a certain pause between the defeat of the Antichrist and the final consummation. The first is: **The dominion of the rest of the wild beasts was taken away; but a prolonging of life was given them for a time and a time** (7.12). And the second is: **From the time of the removal of the perpetual sacrifice, when the abomination of desolation shall be set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waits, and comes to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days** (12.11-12).

St. Hippolytus comments on the second passage: "When the abomination of desolation comes and wages war against the saints, whoever will survive his days, and reach the forty-five days, while the other period of fifty days advances, to him the Kingdom of Heaven comes. The Antichrist indeed enters even into part of the fifty days, but the saints shall inherit the Kingdom along with Christ."[242]

But why, asks Blessed Jerome, is there a silence of 45 days after the defeat of the Antichrist? God only knows, he replies, but suggests that this putting off of the kingdom of the saints is a testing of their patience.[243]

Perhaps the extra *forty-five* days mentioned by Daniel are related to the *forty* days mentioned by St. Ephraim the Syrian as intervening between the fall of the Antichrist and the Last Judgement: "The angels approaching shall seize the accursed, and in the same moment the Lord shall command from His heavens, and He shall overthrow the accursed and all his forces and on the instant the angels shall thrust them down to gehenna. And all who believed in him shall be thrust down amid the flames. Then the Lord shall descend from on high, amid the fearful glory of the angels, and His chariot shall halt between heaven and earth. He shall speak to the sea and it shall dry up, and the fish shall die in the midst of it. The heavens and the earth shall be dissolved, and become darkness and gloom. The Lord shall send fire upon the earth, continuing for forty days, and shall purify it from iniquity, and from the pollution of sin."[244]

An unknown Russian priest, the author of a work entitled *The Apocalypse*, writes: "According to the tradition of the Glinsk elders, it is also thought that after the casting of the Antichrist and the false prophet alive into the gehenna

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[242] St. Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 40.
[243] St. Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, 4, XII, 12; *M.P.G.* 25, col. 579B; CCSL 75A: 943, 671-944, 677). See also the Venerable Bede, *On the Apocalypse* (*P.L.* 93: 154C) and *On What Isaiah Says* (*P.L.* 94:708), in W. Trent Foley and Arthur G. Holder, *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, Liverpool University Press, 1999, p. 49.
[244] St. Ephraim, op. cit., p. 357.

of fire, this world will not immediately come to an end after this. There will pass another 45 days, and then will come the Terrible Judgement. When the heavens are opened and the King of Glory, our Lord Jesus Christ, will appear sitting on a white horse, and when He by the Spirit of His mouth will kill the Antichrist and the false prophet and those who are with him in Armageddon, the end of the world will not come immediately after this, but in the heavens there will remain shining with an ineffable heavenly light that Cross of the Lord which will precede the Lord of Glory, and on which He was crucified in the days of His first Coming to earth.

"This honourable Cross of the Lord will shine in the heavens for 45 days until the Second Coming of the Lord at the Terrible Judgement, by its appearance calling those who have remained alive to repentance. Although the Antichrist and the false prophet will no longer be on earth, the ancient snake-devil will continue to act on it together with Gog and Magog, thinking to sweep off the face of the earth the city of Jerusalem in Palestine, where there will begin to gather the Orthodox Christians who have been hiding in the wilderness and who now feel some relief from the fact that the Antichrist is no more and that the whole of his power has been shattered at one moment – it was sufficient merely for Christ the Saviour to appear in the heavens. The whole world, confused by the Antichrist and having drunk to the dregs the punishments of God will once more, by the mercy of God, be called to repentance by the voiceless shining in the heavens of the honourable Cross. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!

"Although the people, deceived by the Antichrist, bowed down to him and received his seal, and although they thereby lost the capacity to cross themselves, thereby falling away by their terrible renunciation of Christ the Saviour, our true God, and although they will have lost the Divine grace of Christ, nevertheless there will awake in some at the sight of the Cross shining in the heavens a feeling of repentance and sorrow that they recognised the evil, miserable and vain Antichrist as God and bowed down to him. Now, at the sight of the Cross of the Lord, they will bitterly groan and weep about this, and the merciful and man-loving Lord, not wishing the death of a sinner, but rather that he should repent, will return His grace to such a Christian…

"St. Demetrius of Rostov says: 'After the ruinous death of the Antichrist, those who remain alive will be given a time for repentance by God, as we see in the prophecy of Daniel (12.11-12), in which the Angel said that the Antichrist would reign for 1290 days, and then he added: **Blessed is he that waits, and comes to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days**, that is, there are still 45 days after the death of the Antichrist."[245]

11.15-17. And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying: The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign unto the ages of ages. And

[245] Fomin and Fomina, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 556, 557.

the four and twenty elders, who sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying: We give Thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, Who art, and wast, and art to come; because Thou has taken to Thee Thy great power, and hast reigned.

The sounding of the seventh trumpet of the seventh seal heralds the Second Coming of Christ in glory.

The Lord called Satan **the prince of this world** (John 12.31). And Satan himself claimed to have dominion over the world when he tempted the Lord, showing Him **all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them**, and saying: **All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me** (Matthew 4.8-9). Christ rejected this temptation; but the Antichrist will accept it, which is why he will be given power over the whole world.

However, this power is temporary and illusory. He Who said to Pilate: **Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, unless it were given thee from above** (John 19.11; cf. Wisdom 6.1-3), only grants power to the devil and his servants so that sinners may taste the bitter fruit of their sin and turn to the only true King and God. In the end, the illusory power of the devil will be smashed and all power given to Him to Whom **every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth** (Philippians 2.10).

11.18. And the nations were angry, and Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldest give reward unto Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and those that fear Thy name, shall and great; and shouldest destroy those that destroy the earth.

"Finally, after having been long-suffering, He sends against the unbelieving nations, which are angry at this as if it were a new or strange teaching, their punishment. **The time of the dead** indicates the time of the resurrection of the dead, in which to each will be given a reward corresponding to his deeds.

"By **the prophets, and the saints, and those that fear His name**, one may understand three degrees of men: those who offer fruit a hundredfold, sixtyfold, and thirtyfold (Matthew 13.23). The apostles, however, will receive the first place and sit on twelve thrones. **Small and great**, we think, refer either to the lesser saints and those who surpass them, or else the small are sinners who have been belittled, and the great are the righteous" (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

11.19. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament; and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

"Then, from the mountains of Palestine, the Ark of the Covenant will appear. The Prophet Jeremiah hid the Ark and the Holy Fire in a deep well. When they took water from that well it burst into flame. But the Ark itself they did not find."[246]

"The opening of heaven and the appearance of the ark refers to "the revelation of the good things prepared for the saints, which things, according to the apostle, are all hidden in Christ, in Whom **dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily** (Colossians 2.3-9). These things will be revealed at the same time that the lawless and impious ones will be sent frightful voices, lightnings, thunderings, and hail. The change of the present world in the earthquake symbolises the torments of gehenna." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

According to St. Athanasius the Great, the **lightnings** signify the holy apostles, and the **thunderings** - the evangelical teaching.[247] **Earthquakes** are one of the signs of the End, according to the Lord Himself (Matthew 24.7; cf. Revelation 16.18). Grant Jeffrey writes: "Massive earthquakes are now occurring worldwide in **diverse places**. Enormous forces are accumulating far beneath the massive tectonic plates supporting the continents. Scientists warn that the major earthquakes felt recently in California, Japan, and other parts of the Pacific Rim are only a foretaste of the coming 'Big One', the most massive earthquake in human history. Major 'killer' quakes (7.2 or greater on the Richter Scale) occurred only once per decade throughout history until our century. However, since A.D. 1900, the growth in major earthquakes has been relentless. From 1900 to 1949 it averaged three major quakes per decade. From 1949 the increase became awesome with 9 killer quakes in the 1950s; 13 in the 1960s, 56 in the 1970s and an amazing 74 major quakes in the 1980s. Finally, in the 1990s, at the present rate, we will experience 125 major killer quakes in the decade… The prophets warned that the planet will be shaken in the last days as never before. The judgement of God will finally unleash the greatest earthquake in history…"[248]

According to many of the Fathers, the Second Coming of Christ will be preceded by the sign of the Cross, **the sign of the Son of man in heaven** (Matthew 24.30). Thus St. Narses: "Then doth appear in brilliancy the royal sign unto the strengthening of those that took refuge in Him unto the glory of the just ones, for that they bound themselves in His love. The parts of the all-victorious cross flash with light, and the hosts of the holy Church.. take their full growth along with the Lord's cross; and full of light they are yet eclipsed by its light. Let the nations mourn, for He cometh to judge them that were not sealed therewith, them that knew it not the sign of the Lord.

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[246] St. John Maximovich, "A Talk on the Dread Judgement", in *Man of God: Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco*, Redding, Ca.: Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, 1994, p. 179.
[247] St. Athanasius, *Commentary on Psalm 76*, 11; *M.P.G.* 27, coll.348.
[248] Jeffrey, op. cit. p. 194.

"Then there cometh from heaven in unspeakable glory the King of glory. The heavens are shrivelled up and are consumed like wax before the fire. Rivers running free and full of gloom pour down from on high, purifying the earth from all lawlessness and foul deeds. There are heard the voices of the army of light. There stir the hosts of heaven, and the great trumpet sounds among the tombs. Arise, ye dead, to meet the Bridegroom! For He is here, He is come in His Father's glory. Arise, just ones and sinners, and receive your reward!

"Then with grief inconsolable shall mourn the creation that is not ready. And in haste they don their bodies that are indestructible. Then the sinners appear in sombre and shadow-like bodies, for they are tinged with the works of their wickedness. Foremost walk in person the elect in resplendent bodies; they are lifted up from earth in clouds of light to meet Christ, and the heavenly ones wonder at them and say: What have they done upon earth, for they come in a crowd unto the Lord full of joy? The Lord will make answer and say to them: These are My good soldiers, who denied themselves, and renounced the earth and crucified themselves along with their passions and desires for their love of Me. Now therefore I will give them joy unending. And when the angels shall hear this, they will say: Ye are blessed by the Lord; rejoice ye therefore in your gladness.

"Then the King of glory shall sit down on His throne; and angels with awe minister unto Him. And first of all Satan is bound without inquisition, and is dispatched into the abyss of Tartarus. And with cruel torments are bound his hosts on the left hand, for they taught men evil works. They do not deserve to be brought to judgement, since they have no defence to make before His tribunal. And without delay they are removed out of His sight. But the just shall stand on His right hand in hope of the good reward. The sinners also stand there in great shame, each for retribution for his deeds. The assize is met and the books are opened; they are bound together in sheaves like the tares and are cast into the unquenchable fire. But unto some also are shut the doors of the blissful wedding, so that they cannot see and look upon the Heavenly Bridegroom; and because they have not lit the torches of pity, He saith unto them: I know you not, get ye out of My sight. But before this the King bestoweth the heavenly crown upon the worthy, saying unto them: Come, ye blessed ones of My Father, and inherit the Kingdom made ready for you from the beginning of the world."[249]

St. Ephraim writes: "A throne shall be prepared, and the Son shall sit upon the right hand, and twelve seats shall be placed for the twelve apostles; dwellings adorned for the martyrs, and a palace for the saints. The angels shall sound their trumpets, and the dead shall rise from their graves. And in a moment the angels shall gather together all the children of Adam, and they shall bring the wheat into the barn, but the chaff shall they cast into fire: the good shall enter into the Kingdom, and the evil shall dwell in gehenna. The

[249] St. Narses, in Bousset, op. cit., pp. 257-259.

just shall fly to heaven, and the sinner shall be burned with fire. The martyrs shall fly to the bridal chambers, and the evil go out into darkness. But Christ shall reign forever, and He shall be King unto generations of generations. To Him be glory; and upon us be mercy, unto the ages of ages. Amen. Amen."[250]

[250] St. Ephraim, op. cit., pp. 357-358.

III. THE THIRD VISION: THE CHURCH IN ETERNITY

12.1-2. And there appeared a great wonder in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

"Certain commentators have seen in this mystical woman the Most Holy Theotokos; but such outstanding commentators as St. Hippolytus, St. Methodius and St. Andrew of Caesarea find that this is 'the Church clothed in the Word of the Father, shining more brightly than the sun' [St. Hippolytus]. This brilliance of the sun likewise signifies that she possesses the true knowledge of God and His laws and contains His revelations. The moon under her feet is a sign that she is above everything mutable. St. Methodius considers the moon allegorically to be 'the faith of those cleansed of corruption by the bath, that is, baptism, since upon the moon depends the nature of moisture'.

"On her head is a crown of twelve stars which signifies that, being originally gathered together from the twelve tribes of Israel, she was later guided by the twelve apostles, who comprise her light-bearing glory.

"From the fact that she is in pain during childbirth, it is evident that it is incorrect to see in this woman the Most Holy Theotokos, for here giving birth to the Son of God was without pain. These torments of birthgiving signify the difficulties which had to be overcome by the Church of Christ when she was being established in the world (martyrdom, the spread of heresies). At the same time it signifies, in the explanation of St. Andrew, that 'the Church is pained for each one of those who is reborn by water and the Spirit until, as the divine apostle has said, **Christ shall be formed in them** (Galatians 4.19)'. St. Methodius says: 'The Church has pain giving rebirth from natural to spiritual men in the likeness of Christ'." (Archbishop Averky)

Patriarch Nicon of Moscow: "Theologians understand by this woman the Church of God."[251]

"These torments are the tortures and labours of the Christian Church which she will experience at her giving birth - the acquisition of every new member, when those in error are converted, when the sinner repents (St. Hippolytus). They refer in general to every period of the existence of the Christian Church." (Lopukhin)

However, a more specific period may also be intended. Let us consider the image of the travailing woman in another famous prophecy: **Thou Bethlehem Ephratha, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of**

[251] Fomin, S. & Fomin, T. *Russia before the Second Coming*, Sergiev Posad, 1998, third edition, volume I, p. 274 (in Russian).

thee shall He come forth unto Me Him Who is to be ruler in Israel; Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will He give them up, until the time that she who travaileth hath brought forth. Then the remnant of His brethren shall return unto the children of Israel (Micah 5.2-3).

Here Christ's Nativity in Bethlehem is followed by the rejection of the Jews (**He will give them up**) until the travailing woman gives birth, when the Jews will return to the Church (**the remnant… shall return to the children of Israel**).

So if **she who travaileth** in Micah is the same as the travailing woman of the Apocalypse, she may be interpreted to refer both to the Church of *all* ages and, more specifically, to the Church of the *last* times, when the remnant of the Jews will return to the *true* children of Israel, the Church. And the child she travails to bring forth is both the generation of *all* Christians, of whom the Lord said: **This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled** (Matthew 24.34), and, more specifically, the *last* generation of Christians.

Another indication that the reference may be also to the Christians of the last times comes from a vision given to a priest in 1866. In his sleep he saw "a large cave dimly lit by a single oil-lamp. In the cave were many clergy. Behind the oil-lamp was an icon of the Mother of God. In front of the icon there stood, clad in vestments, the Moscow archpastor Philaret (who is still among the living) and the reposed protopriest of Rzhev, Fr. Matthew Konstantinovsky, the father of the aforesaid priest, outstanding during his life for his great piety. They all stood in silence and fear. At the entrance to the cave was the same priest and a layman, his spiritual son. They both trembled, not daring to go in. From among those praying the words of supplication were clearly heard: 'We are living through a terrible time: we have reached the seventh summer!' These words produced great fear and agitation. The dream was repeated three times - each time exactly the same, without the slightest change, clear and terrifying... Neither the priest who had this vision, nor the spiritual son of Fr. Matthew understood it at all, neither what it meant nor to whom it was sent."

St. Ambrose of Optina interpreted this vision as follows: "The large cave dimly lit by a single oil-lamp may mean the present situation of the Church, in which the light of faith is almost quenched and the darkness of unbelief, of boldly blasphemous free-thinking and the new paganism spreads and penetrates everywhere. This truth is confirmed by the words that were heard: 'We are living through a terrible time'. The living hierarch and the reposed protopriest praying together in front of the icon of the Mother of God lead us to suppose that the other clergy in the vision were of two kinds (the heavenly Church and the earthly Church), evidently worthy pastors, both the one who is alive and the one departed to the Lord, who look on the wretched state of our Church - and these and others pray to the heavenly Queen that she may

spread her all-powerful veil over our wretched Church and defend and support her, and preserve the weak who nevertheless have a pious attitude towards salvation... It may be that those standing in the entrance to the cave represent people who look with lively feeling and sorrow, even pain, on the sad events of our time as regards faith and morality, but do not run to the heavenly Queen and do not pray to her, as did those in the cave, for her veil and assistance... *The words 'We have reached the seventh summer' may mean the last time, close to the time of the Antichrist, when the faithful members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church will have to hide in caves, and only the all-powerful prayers of the Mother of God can then hide them from the persecution of the servants of the Antichrist.*"[252]

This mention of the Mother of God is apposite, for even if the woman clothed with the sun is not the Mother of God, but the Church, the relationship between the Mother of God and the Church is very close. Just as the Church is the Mother of all Christians, so is the Mother of God. And just as the Church protects all her children from the Antichrist, so does the Mother of God. That is why the identification of the woman clothed with the sun with the Mother of God, even if not strictly correct, can hardly be called erroneous, either. Thus St. Demetrius of Rostov writes: "As in former times St. John the Theologian saw a great vision in the heavens of a woman clothed with the sun, so in the same way St. Andrew in the Vlachernae church, similar to heaven, saw the Unwedded Bride dressed in a sun-bright purple mantle. The vision as seen by St. John the Theologian prefigured out All-merciful Protectress; in the same way this vision appeared at the time when the impending destruction of all creatures was revealed to the scrutiniser of hearts: **and there were lightnings and voices, and thunderings and an earthquake and great hail. And there appeared a great wonder heaven, a woman clothed with the sun**. Why did this vision which prefigured our All-pure Virgin, not appear before lightnings, thunderings, voices, earthquakes and hail, while all the elements were still silent, but during the most fearful disturbance in heaven and on earth? In order to show that our All-blessed Protectress hastens to help us in the most difficult times, at the approach of our destruction, and protects us from the seductive glamour which does not shine for long, from the vanity of the world, from the voices of worldly pride and vanity, from the thunderings of the unexpected attack of enemies, from the winds of passion, from the hail from heaven of punishment for our sins which threatens us..."[253]

12.3. And there appeared another wonder in heaven. And behold! a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

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[252] St. Ambrose of Optina, op. cit., part 1, pp. 21-22.

[253] St. Demetrius, *Homily on the Feast of the Protecting Veil*, translated in *Orthodox Life*, September-October, 1975. Other Fathers who identified the Woman with Mary are Saints Epiphanius and Augustine. See Livius, op. cit., p. 269.

"Although the dragon is a sea monster (Isaiah 51.34), it has been turned into a symbol representing earthly power, the master of the world. Therefore the devil as the prince of this world appears in the Apocalypse under the image of a dragon. This is confirmed in verse 9, where the great dragon is directly called by his own name, the devil and Satan (St. Victorinus, St. Andrew of Caesarea)." (Lopukhin)

"In this image of the dragon one cannot but see the ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, of whom mention will be made below (v. 9). The red colour signifies his bloodthirsty cruelty." (Archbishop Averky)

The identification of the seven heads and ten horns can be deferred until the fuller discussion of them in the commentary on chapter seventeen.

12.4. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth; and the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as he was born.

"Tichonius, as his manner is, interprets the third part of the stars which fell, to false brethren." (The Venerable Bede).

"By these stars which the devil draws after himself in his fall, commentators understand the fallen angels or demons. By them we can also understand representatives of the churches and teachers who are corrupted by satanic power. As for the dragon standing before the woman, St. Andrew writes: 'The devil always arms himself against the Church and increasingly strives to make those reborn by Her his food.'" (Archbishop Averky)

12.5. And she brought forth a man child, who was to shepherd all nations with a rod of iron. And her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne.

Thou shalt herd them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt shatter them like a potter's vessels (Psalm 2.9). **He shall shepherd them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of My Father** (Revelation 2.27).

"Although the devil opposes, the Church ever brings forth Christ" (The Venerable Bede).

"This is an image of the Lord Jesus Christ, as St. Andrew says: 'In the person of those who are baptized, the Church ceaselessly gives birth to Christ; just as, according to the apostle, we come **unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ** (Ephesians. 4.13). St. Hippolytus says likewise: 'The Church will not cease to give birth from Her heart to the Word which is persecuted in the world by unbelievers.' The Church always gives birth to Christ through men, and from the very beginning Satan has striven to devour Christians as he did in the Person of Christ.

"Just as the Lord Jesus Christ was caught up to heaven on the day of His glorious Ascension and sat upon the throne of His Father at His right hand; so also all the saints in whom Christ is depicted are caught up unto God so as not to be conquered by temptations which surpass their powers. Thus also are all Christians of the last times to be caught up **to meet the Lord in the air** (II Thessalonians 4.17)." (Archbishop Averky)

However, it is contrary to tradition to describe the Mother of God as **travailing in birth** to give birth to Christ; for we know that her birthgiving was painless. Therefore it seems more fitting to see in the **man-child**, not Christ, but the last generation of Christians, as indicated above. Another, very tentative hypothesis is that just as, in 2.27, the shepherding of the nations with a rod of iron is promised, not to Christ, but to an ordinary man, so here the reference is to an ordinary man – specifically, one from the line of Orthodox Christian emperors from Constantine the Great to Tsar Nicholas II. For these shepherded the nations with a rod or iron while being at the same time children of the Church. Or perhaps we could say that the **man-child** is *the Orthodox autocracy.* But in 1917 the Orthodox autocracy was **caught up to heaven** through martyrdom, and the Church was forced to flee into the wilderness.

Moreover, there is a tradition that the Orthodox autocracy will be **caught up to heaven** in the sense that it will be voluntarily given up to God by the last emperor. Thus we read: "Already is the kingdom of the Romans swept away, *and the empire of the Christians is delivered unto God and the Father* and when the kingdom of the Romans shall begin to be consumed then shall come the consummation."[254]

However, it is not written that the man-child actually ruled the nations, but that he **was to** shepherd them - that is, was marked out to shepherd them, but was prevented from doing so. So a perhaps more precise variant of this line of interpretation would identify the **man-child** with the Tsarevich Alexis of Russia, who, being born in 1904, when the first blast of the revolutionary storm was about to fall on Russia, as heir to the throne **was to shepherd all the nations** of the far-flung empire, and embodied the hopes for the future of the dynasty in the minds of all truly Orthodox Christians. However, the **red dragon**, the Soviet demon, tried to destroy these hopes from the beginning; and after the failure of its first attempt, in the 1905 revolution, it achieved greater success through the insinuation of the devouring figure of Rasputin at the sick child's bedside. Just as the sick Tsarevich symbolized the future of the Orthodox Church, so Rasputin symbolized the devil trying to destroy that future. Finally, in the assassination of the Royal Family on July 4, 1918, the child together with his whole family **was caught up unto God, and to His**

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[254] *Pseudo-Ephraim*, 5; translated in W. Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend*, London: Hutchinson, 1896, p. 125. Similar statements are to be found in pseudo-Methodius, the Greek Apocalypse of Daniel and the Venerable Bede. See Bousset, chapter 4.

throne; for **he, being made perfect in a short time, fulfilled a long time; for his soul pleased the Lord. Therefore hasted He to take him away from among the wicked** (Wisdom 4.13-14). This, it must be emphasised, is a very tentative interpretation…

12.6. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

The woman (i.e. the Church) flees into the wilderness immediately after her man-child (i.e. the Christian empire) is taken up to heaven. This certainly corresponds to the course of events under the collective Antichrist in Russia after the murder of the Tsar and his family. It corresponds also to what Church Tradition tells us concerning the very last persecution, under the personal Antichrist, which will take place after the removal of the last Roman (i.e. Orthodox Christian) emperor.

Thus Tertullian writes: "There is also a greater need for us to pray for the emperors as also for the whole state of the empire, and for Roman affairs since we know that by the provision of the Roman empire the mighty power impending on the whole world and threatening the very close of the century with frightful calamities shall be delayed; and as we are loath to suffer these things, while we pray for their postponement we favour the stability of Rome."[255] And again: "The Christian is hostile to no one, least of all to the emperor, to whom… he wishes well, with the whole Roman empire, so long as the world shall last, for so long it shall last."[256] And St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes: "The predicted Antichrist comes when the seasons of the kingdom of the Romans are fulfilled."[257]

Schema-Monk Epiphanius (Chernov) writes: "The True Church of Christ during the period of the Antichrist's rule, through Her very refusal to compromise with him as being the enemy of God and the destroyer of man annihilating the Church, cannot exist and operate in the open. She **flees to the mountains, to the desert**. She hides Herself **in caves and dens of the earth**. However, all these expressions, being of a prophetic nature, must be understood, not literally, but allegorically, as images and symbols of the fact that the True Church of Christ, being inspired from above, in one way or another departs into obscurity, becomes unnoticed, absent from external life, invisible, unapproachable, secret, hidden from the Antichrist destroyer and from his numerous atheist and antitheist servants."[258]

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[255] Tertullian, *Apologetics*, 32.
[256] Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 2.
[257] St. Cyril, *Catechetical Lectures*, XV, 11.
[258] Chernov, op. cit. A similar interpretation is given by Hieromartyr Sinesius, Bishop of Izhevsk (in Chernov, op. cit.) and by St. John Maximovich (*Orthodox Life*, 1985, no. 2, p. 31). As we read in another Catacomb Church document: "Just as the Soviet kingdom is a prefiguration of the Antichrist, so also the 'Catacomb' Church is the nearest of all prefigurations of the Church in the time of the Antichrist - the Woman clothed with the sun

St. Anatolius of Optina (+1922) prophesied concerning the snares that the devil would set for the Catacomb Church: "Heresies will spread everywhere and deceive many people. The enemy of the human race will act with cunning in order to draw into heresy, if possible, even the elect. He will not begin by crudely rejecting the dogmas of the Holy Trinity, the Divinity of Jesus Christ and the virtue of the Theotokos, but he will begin imperceptibly to distort the teachings and statutes of the Church and their very spirit, handed down to us by the Holy Fathers through the Holy Spirit. Few will notice these wiles of the enemy, only those more experienced in the spiritual life. Heretics will seize power over the Church and will place their servants everywhere; the pious will be regarded with contempt. He (the Lord) said, 'by their fruits ye shall know them', and so, by their fruits, as well as by the actions of the heretics, strive to distinguish them from the true pastors. These are spiritual thieves, plundering the spiritual flock, and they will enter the sheepfold (the Church), climbing up some other way, as the Lord said: They will enter by an unlawful way, using force and trampling upon the Divine statutes. The Lord calls them robbers (cf. John 10.1). Indeed, their first task will be the persecution of the true pastors, their imprisonment and exile, for without this it will be impossible for them to plunder the sheep.

"Therefore, my son, when you see the violation of patristic tradition and the Divine order in the Church, the order established by God, know that the heretics have already appeared, although for the time being they may conceal their impiety. Or they will distort the Divine Faith imperceptibly, in order to succeed better in seducing and enticing the inexperienced into the net. The persecution will be directed against not only pastors but against all servants of God, for all those ruled by heresy will not endure piety. Recognize these wolves in sheep's clothing by their proud dispositions and love of power. They will be slanderers, traitors, everywhere sowing enmity and malice. Therefore the Lord said that by their fruits you will know them. True servants of God are humble, love their neighbour and are obedient to the Church. Monastics will be greatly oppressed by the heretics and monastic life will be scorned. Monasteries will become scarce, the number of monastics will decline, and those who remain will endure violence. These haters of monastic life, however, having only the appearance of piety, will strive to attract the monks to their side, promising them protection and worldly goods, and threatening those who oppose them with expulsion. These threats will cause great despair among the fainthearted, but you, my son, rejoice that you have lived until that time, for then the faithful who have not shown any other virtues, will receive crowns merely for standing firm in the faith, according to the word of the Lord (cf. Matthew 10.32). Fear the Lord, my son. Fear to lose the crown prepared (for you), fear to be cast by Christ into the outer darkness and eternal torment. Stand bravely in the faith, and if necessary, endure

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who has fled into the wilderness. Her garments are woven of the exploits of saints. Just as in the time of the Prophet Elijah, the Lord has preserved for Himself seven thousand faithful, until the time known to Him alone." (in Andreyev, op. cit., pp. 539-41).

persecution and other sorrows, for the Lord will be with you... and the holy martyrs and confessors, they will look upon you and your struggle with joy. But woe to the monks in those days who will be bound by possessions and riches, who because of love of peace will be ready to submit to the heretics. They will lull to sleep their conscience, saying, 'We are preserving and saving the monastery and the Lord will forgive us.' The unfortunate and blind ones do not at all consider that through heresy the demons will enter the monastery and then it will no longer be a holy monastery, but merely walls from which grace will depart. God, however, is more mighty than the enemy, and He will never leave His servants. True Christians will remain until the end of this age, only they will choose to live in secluded, deserted places. Do not fear sorrows, rather fear pernicious heresy, for it strips us of grace and separates us from Christ. This is why the Lord commanded us to consider the heretic as a pagan and a publican. And so, my son, strengthen yourself in the grace of Jesus Christ. Hasten to confess the faith, to endure suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (cf. II Timothy 2.1-3), Who has said, 'Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life' (Revelation 2.10). To Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be honour, glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen."[259]

Another Optina elder, St. Barsanuphius (+1912) said: "In the last days before the Coming of Christ the Church will be completely preserved in this form: one Orthodox bishop, one Orthodox priest and one Orthodox laymαn. I am not telling you that there will be no churches at all, perhaps there will be some, but Orthodoxy will be preserved only in this form. You mark my words. You know, this will be throughout the world."[260]

St. Hippolytus writes that in this period the Church "flees from city to city, and seeks concealment in the wilderness among the mountains, possessed of no other defence than the two wings of the great eagle, that is to say, the faith of Jesus Christ, Who, in stretching forth His holy hands on the holy tree, unfolded two wings, the right and the left, and called to Himself all those who believed on Him, and covered them as a hen her chickens. For by the mouth of Malachi also He speaks thus: **And unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings** (4.2)."[261]

The first period in the history of the Church in which the faithful had to flee into the wilderness from an antichristian persecution was the seven-year period of Midianite oppression – seven years is the period that the Antichrist is prophesied to reign - in the time of Gideon. Thus **because of the Midianites the children of Israel made for themselves the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds** (Judges 6.2). **They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth** (Hebrews 11.38).

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[259] St. Anatolius, in Fomin, op. cit., pp. 277-278 (in Russian).
[260] St. Barsanuphius, in Fomin, op. cit., p. 284.
[261] St. Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 61.

12.7-12. And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven: Now is come salvation, and strength, and the Kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven (Luke 10.18). **Now is the judgement of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out** (John 12.31).

Rejoice, thou through whom peace and tranquillity made their abode in heaven!
Rejoice, thou by whom the spirits of evil were cast down even unto hell![262]

The most obvious interpretation of this passage is that it refers to "the first expulsion of the devil from the angelic ranks because of pride and envy, and also to his defeat by the cross of the Lord, when, as the Lord says, **the prince of this world is condemned** and cast out from his former lordship (John 12.31)" (St. Andrew).

Thus St. Justin the Martyr writes: "Before the Lord's appearance [on earth] Satan never dared to blaspheme God, inasmuch as he did not yet know his own sentence, because it was contained in parables and allegories. But after the Lord's appearance, when he had clearly ascertained from the words of Christ and His apostles that eternal fire had been prepared for him as he had apostasised from God of his own free-will, and likewise for all those who continue impenitently in their apostasy, he now blasphemes"[263] - and with **great wrath**, for he knows **that he hath but a short time.**

However, there may also be a reference here to Satan's casting out by the martyrs; for these are they who **overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.**

Perhaps the reference is to two battles in which he is defeated: "one with the Archangel Michael and his heavenly hosts in heaven, and the other with the martyrs of Christ on earth. Satan has still preserved some appearance of power on earth, crawling over it like a serpent. Having come to his last days on earth, Satan is devising a last and decisive battle with God and believing

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[262] *Akathist to the Archangel Michael*, Ikos IV.
[263] St. Justin, in St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 26, 2.

Christians with the aid of the Antichrist and his accomplice the false prophet." (Archbishop Averky)

Alternatively, a single battle is being referred to, a battle on earth, but painted in the colours of the primeval, heavenly battle. This is the battle of the Orthodox Church with the revolution, in which the Lord, through the prayers of the angels and martyrs, expels the devil from "heaven" - that is, the Church, into which he has insinuated himself by force and deceit. In this battle of the last times **there will arise**, according to the Archangel Gabriel, the great Archangel **Michael**, **the great prince who stands for the sons of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as has never been since there was a nation till now** (Daniel 12.1).

12.13-16. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman who brought forth the man child. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

If the **man child**, as indicated earlier, is the Tsarevich Alexis, then **the woman who brought him forth** is the Russian Church. And from 1918 the Russian Church fled into **the wilderness** – that is, the catacombs of Soviet life, in which the true faith was nourished in opposition to Soviet power.

Cf. Zechariah: **And the angel that talked with me went forth, and said to me: Lift up thine eyes, and see this that goes forth. And he said: This is their iniquity in all the earth. And behold a talent of lead lifted up; and behold a woman sat in the midst of the measure. And he said: This is lawlessness. And he cast it into the midst of the measure, and cast the weight of lead on the mouth of it. And I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold, two women coming forth, and the wind was in their wings; and they had stork's wings; and they lifted up the measure between the earth and the sky. And I said to the angel that spoke with me: Whither do these carry away the measure? And he said to me: To build it a house in the land of Babylon, and to prepare a place for it; and they shall set it there on its own base.** (5.5-11).

The True Church is lifted by eagle's wings (the two Testaments, according to the Venerable Bede) into the desert of spiritual freedom. Meanwhile, the false church is lifted by stork's wings into the land of spiritual confusion - for "Babylon" means "confusion". In chapter seventeen of the Apocalypse we shall see the false church depicted under the image of an harlot with the name of - Babylon...

The True Church is like the vine of the Prophet Ezekiel's vision, which twines itself around the great eagle, Christ: **And there was another great eagle, with great wings and many claws. And behold, this vine bent itself round towards him, and her roots were turned towards him, that he might water her together with the growth of her plantation. She thrives in a fair field by much water, to produce shoots and bear fruit, that she might become a great vine.** (17.7-8).

"The devil does not cease to persecute the Church, but the Church, having two eagle's wings - the Old and the New Testaments - will hide from the devil in the wilderness, by which we must understand both a spiritual and a sensible wilderness, in which the true Christian ascetics hid themselves and hide themselves now. St. Andrew of Caesarea says: 'And so it is always, but especially at the coming of the Antichrist, who will reign for three-and-a-half years. At that time it may be there will escape from him those who have hidden in the literal wilderness - the mountains, holes and caves" (Archbishop Averky).

A time, and times, and half a time. This phrase, taken from the Prophet Daniel (Daniel 7.25, 12.7), signifies three-and-a-half years according to SS. Cyril of Jerusalem, Ephraim the Syrian, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Theodoretus of Cyrus and Andrew of Caesarea.[264] In other places in the Apocalypse the same period is described as forty-two months or 1260 days.

Several of the most important periods of antichristian persecution in sacred history lasted for three and a half years. Thus the holy Prophet Elijah spent three and a half years in the wilderness, fleeing from Jezebel. And in the time of the Maccabees the temple was desecrated for three and a half years by Antiochus Epiphanes. And "Jesus Himself spent three and a half years in Egypt, fleeing from Herod." (Patriarch Anthimus) And Christ's public ministry lasted for three and a half years, during the whole of which he was opposed by the Jewish Antichrist. And the Christians fled to Pella for three and a half years during the Romans' siege of Jerusalem in 66-70 A.D. And the persecution of Diocletian lasted for three and a half years, from February, 305 to July, 308 (Archbishop Averky). And the first and most destructive period of persecution of the Russian Church by the Soviet Antichrist lasted for about three and a half years, from October, 1917 to March, 1921, when the last major rebellion against Soviet rule in Kronstadt was crushed and the Tenth Party Congress set the seal on the doctrine of "democratic centralism", i.e. the dictatorship of Lenin. Finally, the persecution of the personal Antichrist will last for three and a half years. For, on the basis of several passages from Daniel and Revelation, the holy Fathers unanimously asserted that the reign of the personal Antichrist, the false messiah and king of the Jews, would last for seven years, the second half of which, three-and-a-half years or forty-two months in duration, would witness his persecution of the Church.

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[264] See I. Nikolsky, "A Collection of patristic opinions on the duration of the reign of the Antichrist", in Barsov, op. cit., pp. 188-190.

"By this **water** St. Andrew understands 'a multitude either of evil spirits, or of various temptations' and by the **earth** which swallowed up this water - 'the humility in wisdom of the saints, who, saying from the heart: **I am dust and ashes** (Genesis 18.27), tear up all the nets of the devil; for, as was revealed by an angel to the divine Anthony, nothing so cuts off and destroys the power of the devil as humility.' Some understand by this the terrible persecutions against the Church from the pagan emperors, and the rivers of Christian blood which flowed at that time. Like a river flowing over the earth and being swallowed up by it, all the spiteful attempts of Satan came to nothing and disappeared without trace, when Christianity triumphed over paganism during the time of Constantine the Great." (Archbishop Averky)

Tikhomirov writes: "By the **Woman** interpreters understand the Church. By the **child –** the believers borne by her. By the **desert** is to be understood the *world* which is estranged from Christ. The **sea** signifies the turbulent masses of the peoples. The **earth** is the peoples, but in a cultural sense [for 'the cultural **earth** will probably always serve as a hindrance to such destructive attacks of the mob']. The **flood of water** is the striving of the peoples."[265]

12.17. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandment of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

"This is that unending, age-old battle which the devil has waged against all the true sons of the Church with the establishment of Christianity on the earth, and which he will continue to wage with ever-increasing power until the end of the world, until his efforts will be exhausted and come to an end in the person of the Antichrist." (Archbishop Averky)

Since 1917 the devil has waged a bitter war against the True, Catacomb Church of Russia, and the war is not over yet….

[265] Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 560.

2. The First Beast

The image of the first beast of Revelation chapter 13 has fascinated and appalled generations of Bible students and interpreters. The most various identifications have been made: that it is Nero, or the Roman Empire, or the Roman Papacy, or Patriarch Nicon of Moscow, or Peter the Great, or Napoleon, or Lenin, or the Soviet Union, or Hitler, or Gorbachev, or the European Union, or "Computer"...[266] On one fact most Orthodox interpreters are agreed: that it is *the Antichrist.*

13.1. And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.

"The sea signifies this world and the present age, overwhelmed with salty and bitter waves, in accordance with the Lord's own interpretation of the dragnet cast into the sea (Matthew 13)."[267]

"The dragon is said to be king of all that is in the waters, and whose **heads,** according to David, **are broken in pieces in the sea**" (The Venerable Bede).

Protopriest Opojchenko writes: "The waters of rivers or the sea signify peoples that are more or less numerous; which is why by the words **a beast rising up out of the sea** we must understand a state composed of many peoples – more precisely, the Roman empire."[268]

This interpretation was much favoured by early interpreters, and a strong argument was constructed for the case that the beast signifies the Roman empire *in the first place*, and the Antichrist of the last times secondarily. Thus Protopriest Opojchenko points out that Rome was built on seven hills (the seven heads); that she was **drunk with the blood of the martyrs** (17.6) and persecuted the Church in ten periods or under ten emperors (the ten horns); that she was burned with fire by ten barbarian tribes (17.16). However, already we can see certain inconsistencies in this interpretation. For if the ten horns represent ten persecuting emperors, they cannot at the same time represent ten barbarian tribes. Again, the ten horns are said to burn with fire, not the beast itself, but the whore who sits on the beast…

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[266] John Eadie ("The Man of Sin", in *Greek Text Commentaries: On Thessalonians*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1877, 1979, pp. 335-336) writes: "Victorinus conjectures the man of sin to be a revivified hero or chieftain; Lactantius, that he will be a Syrian sovereign, sprung from an evil spirit; Cyril, that he will be a dragon, who by his sorcery will raise himself to the mastery of the Roman Empire. Theophylact portrays him as a man who will carry Satan along with him. Andreas believes that he will be a king inspired by Satan, who will reconsolidate the old empire of Rome and reign in Jerusalem."

[267] Blessed Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel,* 7.2, 3.

[268] Opojchenko, in Barsov, op. cit., p. 167.

For this reason, we will abandon the Roman interpretation – or rather, incorporate the history of the Roman persecution of the Church into a more complex interpretation of the beast, seeing in it, not one state, but many – or rather, a composite image of antichristian state power throughout history which we will call *the collective Antichrist*… Following the interpretation of the holy New Martyr Jacob Arkatov, which was quoted in the introduction, we shall see the beast coming out of the sea (as opposed to the beast that comes out of the earth, and the beast that comes out of the abyss, which is the *personal* Antichrist) as *Soviet power*. Or rather, Soviet power is the seventh head or incarnation of this first beast.

The development of this interpretation needs to be prefaced by a short introduction on the concept of the Antichrist… Archimandrite Justin (Popovich) writes: "The **Antichrist** will be, as it were, an incarnation of the devil, for Christ is the incarnation of God. The Antichrist will be the personification of evil, hatred, lying, pride and unrighteousness, for Christ is the personification of goodness, love, truth, humility and righteousness. Such will be the chief Antichrist, who will appear before the Second Coming of the Lord Christ, and will stand in the place of God and proclaim himself to be God (destroy at His glorious Second Coming **with the breath of His mouth** (II Thessalonians 2.4). But before him there will be forerunners, innumerable antichrists. For an antichrist is every one who wishes to take the place of Christ; an antichrist is every one who wishes, in place of the truth of Christ, to place his own truth, in place of the righteousness of Christ – his own righteousness, in place of the love of Christ – his own love, in place of the Goodness of Christ – his own goodness, in place of the Gospel of Christ – his own gospel…

"In what does his main lie consist? In the rejection of the God-Man Christ, in the affirmation that Jesus is not God, not the Messiah=Christ, not the Saviour. Therefore this is the work of the Antichrist. The main deceiver in the world is the devil, and with him – the Antichrist. It goes without saying that a deceiver is every one who in any way rejects that Jesus is God, the Messiah, the Saviour. This is the main lie in the world, and all the rest either proceeds from it, or is on the way to it."[269]

St. John of Damascus writes: "Everyone who confesses not that the Son of God came in the flesh and is perfect God, and became perfect man after being God, is Antichrist (I John 2.18, 22; 4.3). But in a peculiar and special sense he who comes at the consummation of the age is called Antichrist. First, then, it is requisite that the Gospel should be preached among all nations, as the Lord said (Matthew 24.14), and then he will come to refute the impious Jews. For the Lord said to them: **I am come in My Father's name and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive** (John 5.43). And the apostle says, **Because they received not the love of the truth that they**

[269] Popovich, *Interpretation of the Epistles of St. John the Theologian*, Munich, 2000, pp. 36, 38 (in Russian).

might be saved, for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thessalonians 2.10-12). The Jews accordingly did not receive the Lord Jesus Christ Who was the Son of God and God, but receive the imposter who calls himself God. For that he will assume the name of God, the angel teaches Daniel, saying these words, **Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers** (Daniel 11.37). And the apostle says: **Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition: who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sitteth in the temple of God** (II Thessalonians 2.3-4)."[270]

Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved… This is the real cause of the appearance of the Antichrist. If people do not wish to know the truth about Christ, they will be deceived by the lie of the Antichrist; **because they obeyed not the truth, a spirit of error shall speak then to this people and to Jerusalem** (Jeremiah 4.11).

This Antichrist-beast is linked with the **red dragon** of chapter twelve; like it, it has seven heads and ten horns. Moreover, just as the seven heads of the dragon are crowned (12.3), so the ten horns of this beast are crowned. Later, we are told that both the seven heads and the ten horns are kings (17.10,12). However, the beast is not the dragon, who is identified with **the devil and Satan** in 12.9, and who is said to **give power to** the beast in 13.2 and 13.4, but a thing or person who is given power by Satan. As St. John Chrysostom writes: "Who is he? Is he Satan? By no means, but some man, who allows him to work fully in him. For he is a man... He will not introduce idolatry, but will be a kind of opponent to God; he will abolish all the gods, and will order men to worship him instead of God, and he will be seated in the temple of God, not only the one in Jerusalem, but also in every church..."[271]

St. John of Damascus, however, thinks that the Antichrist will sit only in the Jewish temple: "In the temple of God, he said; not our temple, but the old Jewish temple. For he will come not to us but to the Jews; not for Christ or the things of Christ." However, as regards the humanity of the Antichrist he is in full agreement with him: "The devil himself does not become man in the way that the Lord was made man. God forbid! But he becomes man as the offspring of fornication and receiveth all the energy of Satan. For God, knowing the strangeness of the choice that he would make, allows the devil to take up his abode in him. Born of a fornicator, he shall be raised in secret, shall be announced to all unexpectedly, and will ascend the throne."[272]

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[270] St. Damascene, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, IV, 26.

[271] St. Chrysostom, *Homily 3 on II Thessalonians*. Other Fathers who agree with St. Chrysostom that the Antichrist will sit in the *Christian* temple include St. Narses of Armenia: "The son of perdition shall therefore sit in the Church of God" (in Bousset, op. cit., p. 255).

[272] St. Damascene, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, IV, 26. Other Fathers who agree with St. Damascene that the Antichrist will sit in the *Jewish* temple include St. Gregory the

The disagreement between St. John Chrysostom and St. John of Damascus is probably, as almost always in the Holy Fathers, only apparent. We know, on the one hand, that the Antichrist will be a Jew, will appeal to the Jews and be hailed by him, and will proclaim himself to be the Messiah they have been waiting for. It is therefore probable that for his enthronement and the culmination of his glory he will rebuild the old Jewish temple – detailed plans for such a temple already exist in Philadelphia, and there have already been several attempts by Jews and Protestant Evangelicals to blow up the mosque that now occupies the site. On the other hand, the personal Antichrist will not appear before a worldwide revival of Orthodox Christianity after the Third World War, followed by a worldwide apostasy. His power will therefore depend on his being able to appeal to Christians as well as Jews. Most probably he will try to Judaize Christianity in a still more subtle way than that Judaizing heresy that was anathematised by the holy Apostle in his epistle to the Galatians (1.8, 1.9). And to the extent that he is successful he will be enthroned spiritually, and perhaps also physically, in Christian temples, too – perhaps even in a Christian church built on the site of the old Jewish temple. For the new temple that is described by the Prophet Ezekiel (chs. 40-45) could be Christian or Jewish – or originally Christian and then defiled by apostasy to Judaism…

Archbishop Averky writes: "Almost all commentators understand by this **beast rising up out of the sea** - the Antichrist rising out of 'the sea of life', that is, from the midst of the race of men which is disturbed like the sea. From this it is clear that the Antichrist will not be some kind of spirit or demon, as some have thought, but a man."

And yet there are hints in some of the prophecies that the conception of the Antichrist will imitate the conception of Christ in that it will be *an attempted union of two natures*, angelic (demonic) and human. Thus St. Nilus the Myrrh-Gusher prophesied: "Yea, evil will be incarnate (the Antichrist will be born) without any masculine seed. Yea, he will be born of seed, but without man's sowing, but will be born through artificial insemination."[273] Again, St. Seraphim of Sarov says: "Jesus Christ, the true God-Man, the Son of God the Father, was born in Israel by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the true Antichrist, the devil-man, will be born amidst the Russians. He will be the son of a fornicating woman of the tribe of Dan and the son of the devil through

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Theologian ("they say that the temple in Jerusalem will be built later, as of the Antichrist who will be believed to be Christ by the Jews", *Oration* 47), by St. Irenaeus ("the temple in Jerusalem was made by the direction of the true God. For the apostle himself, speaking in his own person, distinctly calls it the temple of God... in which temple the adversary shall sit, trying to show himself off as Christ", "he will sit in the temple of Jerusalem" (*Against Heresies*, v, 25, 2, 4)), and by St. Cyril of Jerusalem ("He who will build the temple of Solomon that has been destroyed", *Catechetical Lectures*. xv, 7).

[273] St. Nilus, in Archimandrite Panteleimon, op. cit., p. 78. The editor justly notes here: "This concept [artificial insemination] was entirely new at the time of this revelation which further proves its divine origin."

the artificial transfer to her of the seed of the man, with which the spirit of darkness will settle in her womb. But one of the Russians who will live to the time of the birth of the Antichrist (like Simeon the God-receiver, who announced the birth of the Child Jesus to the world) will curse the newborn babe and will announce to the world that it is the true Antichrist."[274]

13.2. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.

St. Hippolytus of Rome writes: "A lion is Christ, and a lion is the Antichrist; King is Christ, and king is the Antichrist... In the circumcision came the Redeemer into the world, and in like manner will the other come; the Lord sent apostles unto all nations, and in the same way will the other send false apostles; the Saviour gathered the scattered sheep, and in like manner will the other gather the scattered people. The Lord gave a seal to those that believed on Him, and a seal will the other likewise give; in the form of a man appeared the Saviour, and in the form of a man will the other also come; the Lord stood up and exhibited His holy body as a temple, and the other will also set up a temple of stone in Jerusalem."[275]

Two visions from Daniel are relevant here. The first is from chapter two: **You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendour was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.** (2.32-35).

As the Prophet goes on to explain, the gold, the silver, the bronze and the iron refer to four kingdoms, the last of which will destroy its predecessors, but will then be divided. According to the holy fathers, these kingdoms are: the Assyrian-Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Macedonian-Greek and the Roman. "The diminishing value of metals from gold to iron represent the decreasing grandeur of the rulers of the successive empire [for their kingdoms were **inferior to yours**, said the Prophet to Nebuchadnezzar], from the absolute despotism of Nebuchadnezzar to the democratic system of checks and balances that characterized the Roman senates and assemblies."[276]

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[274] St. Seraphim, text supplied by Fr. Victor Potapov, personal communication.
[275] St. Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 6.
[276] *The Lives of the Holy Prophets*, Buena Vista, CO: Holy Apostles Convent, 1998, p. 387. Charles T. Cook put it as follows: "Babylon, the Head of Gold, was governed by an Absolute Autocracy. Medo-Persia, the Breast and Arms of Silver, favoured an Aristocratic Olgarchy. This form gave place to Alexander the Great's Military Oligarchy. And in turn Rome, the

And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. (2.40). Rome did indeed crush the earlier empires. **Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.** (2.41-43).

Michael Nazarov gives an interesting interpretation of this passage: "In the strong iron we can see the positive quality of political power: it crushes the anarchic forces of evil – this is what the calling of the state consists in. The two knees are perhaps the eastern and western parts of the Roman empire. However, the clay that is mixed with it is a clearly apostatic sign. This means that at the end of its development (in the lower part of the legs and in their toes) the Roman empire will consist of a mixed human mass of two different qualities: an iron (restraining) quality and a clay (apostatic) quality. Judging from the description, this concerns all ten of the toes of both legs, which correspond to the ten apocalyptic horn-states (perhaps this figure should not be understood in a literal sense), arising *from both parts of the empire*.

"The successor of the western part of the Roman empire (in the 1st to 5th centuries it also included England) was the 'Holy Roman Empire', which was then divided into Germany, Austria, France, Italy, etc., which spread western European civilisation to new continents, and also created the USA. The succession from the eastern part of the Empire passed through Byzantium to Russia, which then degenerated into the USSR, and to its splinters.

"Thus in the last times (when he who restrains will have been taken away), the most probable interpretation of the **ten horns** in both the prophecy of Daniel and in Revelation is in terms of the various successors of both lines of Roman statehood, which **receive power with the beast as kings for one hour**. By the **iron** in them we can understand the faithful Christians, who no longer have any Christian statehood, but are scattered in the apostasy world, being mixed up with the **clay**."[277]

And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the

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Legs of Iron, represented Democratic Imperialism" ("Is the Book of Daniel Fact or Fiction?" *Watching and Waiting,* 2, May 1919, republished in vol. 28, no. 15, July-September, 2015, p. 238).

[277] Nazarov, *The Mystery of Russia*, Moscow, 1999, pp. 540-541 (in Russian).

mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold…(2.44-45).

The stone, all interpreters are agreed, is Christ, Who comes from the mountain, that is the Holy Virgin, and fills the whole earth with His power, conquering the old Roman empire in the time of Constantine, and perhaps also the clay of the last successors of that empire, the East and West European states and their offshoots round the world, in the time of a new Constantine…

Thus Rome in its various successions and reincarnations will exist to the end of the world – or at least, to the time of the Antichrist. As Nazarov writes: "Insofar as it is precisely the fourth kingdom that will receive on itself the final blow of the stone (at the legs of the image), it is thereby evident that the Roman empire will exist to the end of history as the last empire. This conviction is also often reflected in the patristic tradition (it was shared by Saints: Hippolytus of Rome, John Chrysostom, Blessed Theodoret, Blessed Jerome, Cyril of Jerusalem and others). On this basis [the fifteenth-century] Elder Philotheus [of Pskov] wrote: 'the Roman [Romejskoye] kingdom is indestructible, for the Lord was enrolled into the Roman [Rimskuyu] power' (that is, he was enrolled among the inhabitants at the census in the time of the Emperor Augustus). Here Philotheus distinguishes between the indestructible 'Roman [Romejskoye] kingdom', whose successor was now Rus', and Roman [Rimskoj] power, which had gone into the past."[278]

The second vision is from the seventh chapter of Daniel: **I Daniel beheld, and lo! the four winds of heaven blew violently upon the great sea. And there came up four great beasts out of the sea, differing from one another. The first was a lioness, and her wings as an eagle's. I beheld until her wings were plucked, and she was lifted off from the earth, and she stood on human feet, and a man's heart was given to her. And behold, a second beast like a bear, and it supported itself on one side, and there were three ribs in its mouth, between its teeth. And thus they said to it: Arise, devour much flesh. And after this I looked, and behold another wild beast as a leopard, and it had four wings of a bird upon it; and the wild beast had four heads, and power was given to it. After this one I looked, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and exceedingly strong, and its teeth were of iron, devouring and crushing to atoms; and it trampled the remainder with its feet; and it was altogether different from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. And I noticed his horns, and behold, another little horn came up in the midst of them, and before it three of the former horns were rooted out. And behold, there were eyes as the eyes of a man in this horn, and a mouth speaking great things... These four beasts are four kingdoms that shall rise up on the earth, which shall be taken away. And the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess it unto the ages of ages.** (7.2-8,17-18)

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[278] Nazarov, op. cit., p. 538.

According to St. Hippolytus, these four kingdoms are: the Babylonian (the man's heart being given to the lioness represents sanity being returned to King Nebuchadnezzar), the Medo-Persian (the three ribs represent the three peoples of the Medes, the Persians and the Babylonians), the Greek (the four wings represent the four parts into which Alexander's empire was divided after his death, the kingdoms of Antipater in Macedon-Greece, Lysimachus in Thrace-Asia Minor, Seleucus in Asia and Ptolemy in Egypt) and the Roman, which conquered the other kingdoms and established the strongest empire in human history. The little horn arising out of the Roman empire as the last of its successor-states is - the Antichrist, who "shall set up the kingdom of Judah"[279]. The three kings uprooted by the Antichrist will be Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia, according to St. Hippolytus.[280]

However, a more contemporary interpretation of these three kings is that they are three Orthodox kingdoms that resist the Antichrist to the end. These are, according to Fr. Oleg Molenko, Russia, Greece and Georgia.[281] But we shall discuss the identification of the ten horn-kingdoms in more detail later…

13.3-4. And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed; and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast. And they worshipped the beast, saying: Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?

Many ancient writers thought that the beast was the Emperor Nero, who would rise from the dead, **his deadly wound healed**, and who was called a **lion** by the Apostle Paul (II Timothy 4.17).[282] This interpretation must be rejected; but the idea that the wounded head is a resurrection of the pagan Roman Empire cannot be dismissed so easily. According to St. Andrew of Crete, the wounded head is "the Roman kingdom, which will have suffered a kind of death through division. Autocracy will be re-established, as it was under the Emperor Augustus."

Now the Roman empire more than once underwent a death and resurrection after its division into East and West, a process that was not formalised until the coronation of Charlemagne as a rival Emperor of the Romans in 800. This division did indeed constitute "a kind of death", for in the West, at any rate, it was followed by the descent of the western peoples into the spiritual death of heresy, a process that was completed by the end of

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[279] That is, the modern state of Israel, according to Nazarov, op. cit., p. 541. And insofar as Israel is "the fifty-first state of the USA", the state of the Antichrist could also be said to be the USA, according to Nazarov. For it is the mirror-image in the western half of the Roman empire of Russia in the eastern half, the apostate opposite of "him who restrains" (pp. 542, 544).

[280] St. Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 27.

[281] Molenko, http://www.omolenko.com/texts/tolk17_2.htm (in Russian).

[282] St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 10 on II Timothy*. The belief that the Antichrist will be Nero resurrected is found in some early Western Fathers. See Bousset, op. cit., pp. 128-130.

the eleventh century. Then "autocracy" was "re-established" in the form of the heretical papacy, on the one hand, and the "Holy Roman Empire" on the other.[283] Both powers gradually weakened, but in 1804 Napoleon, who was called "the Antichrist" by the Russian Holy Synod, and anathematised as such, briefly re-established the Holy Roman Empire until his overthrow. A single power over the whole territory of the Western Roman Empire was established again towards the end of the twentieth century in the form of the European Union, which, though formally a democratic confederation, is moving towards a form of despotism.

In the East, much of the Roman Empire fell to the Muslim Arabs in the seventh century, and all of it to the Muslim Turks in 1453. It was transferred to Russia) until 1917. According to Pantazis of Larissa, writing in 1679, the wounded head was one of the Ottoman sultans, Bayazet: "By the beast the saint understands the Muslim (Turkish) religion, which appeared from the south, which is also called the sea, a religion having seven heads, that is, seven sultans before the capture of Constantinople, namely Otman, Amurat, Khalepin, Bayazet, Orkhan, another Amurat and Mehmet who captured Constantinople. This religion had, besides, ten horses, that is, ten kings, after the capture of the kingdom of the Christians who at the beginning, under the honourable King Constantine, was one, but then, with time, divided into ten kings or ten crowns, and it was for this reason that it was easy for the blaspheming Muslim, Mehmed, to take it. This is the name of the blasphemer because each of the seven kings mentioned carries the name of blasphemer Mohammed, which is why they are called Mohammedans and blaspheme God… One of the seven Ottoman kings, Bayazet, swift in war and therefore called lightning, marched to take Constantinople and was defeated by the king of the Tartars and was captured, put into a cage and executed. Thus the Muslim monarchy declined for some time, and one of the seven heads of the beast was wounded, that is, one of the seven Sultans was killed, and then the Muslim dynasty recovered under the succeeding kings and above all under Sultan Mohammed who conquered Constantinople, and thus the wound of the beast was healed, and all the men of the earth were dazzled because of the capture of Constantinople by Mohammed, the Muslim beast."[284]

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[283] The Roman papacy has been seen, not only by Protestant, but also by Orthodox writers, as a resurrection of the pagan Roman empire. Thus Dostoyevsky wrote: "The western church herself distorted the image of Christ, changing herself from a Church into a Roman state, and again incarnating the state in the form of the papacy" (*The Diary of a Writer*, January, 1881). Perhaps the first Orthodox explicitly to identify the Pope with the Antichrist was Arnulph, bishop of Orleans, who in 991, at the Council of Rheims, said that if Pope John XV had not charity and was puffed up with knowledge, he was the Antichrist. See John Eadie, op. cit., p. 341.

[284] Translated by George Vlachos in *Orthodoxie*, N 79, January, 1998, pp. 32, 33 (in French). When the Muslim Omar captured Jerusalem, St. Sophronius of Jerusalem is reported to have said: "This is truly the abomination of desolation, of which the prophet Daniel spoke, and which is in the holy place" (Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 28).

The Muslim beast was wounded again in 1918, after the collapse of the Turkish empire, but is now recovering, if not in the form of a single despotic state, at any rate as a general revival of Muslim power…

However, if we consider the Eastern Roman Empire to have fallen completely, not in 1453, but in 1917, insofar as the rights of New Rome of Constantinople were transferred to the Third Rome of Moscow, then the wounded head must be considered to be *the Soviet Union*.

In 1918 Lenin suffered a near-fatal pistol wound just above the heart - but recovered.[285] In 1919 his empire suffered a near-mortal wound from the White armies - but recovered. And again, still more seriously, from the Nazi armies in 1941 - but recovered. This beast appeared finally to have been killed in 1991, when the red flag came down from the Kremlin. And yet what is KGB-Colonel Putin doing now if not trying to revive the Soviet empire again?

Other signs point to the Soviet Union. Thus from the 1920s and again after 1945 **the whole world wondered after the beast** of Soviet power. Some worshipped it as the pinnacle of human progress: **Who is like unto the beast?** Others, not so fooled, nevertheless bowed down before its military might, saying: **Who is able to make war with him?** Still others **worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast** - the spirit of revolution, and the first revolutionary, Satan himself.[286]

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[285] Demetrius Kolesnichenko writes: "To this day the image of Lenin has a mystical link with the devil; for **the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority** (Revelation 13.2)... It is curious that the people's artist Shukin fell ill and died after performing the role of Lenin on the stage. Undoubtedly a demon entered into him because he shared the experiences of the image. It is not surprising that reception into the Octobrists, the Pioneers, the Komsomol, and the Party, and marriages, conferences and other Soviet enterprises are unfailingly carried out in front of the idol of the leader, and have a magical influence on the masses." ("On the spread of heretical and pagan religious teachings amidst the Orthodox peoples of the USSR", *Free Russia*, N 3 (96), 17 July, 1990 (in Russian).)

[286] Fr. Seraphim Rose writes: "Bakunin found himself on the side of 'Satan, the eternal rebel, the first freethinker and emancipator of worlds'. Nietzsche proclaimed himself 'Antichrist'. Poets, decadents, and the avant-garde in general since the Romantic era have been greatly fascinated by Satanism, and some have tried to make it into a religion. Proudhon in so many words actually invoked Satan: 'Come to me, Lucifer, Satan, whoever you may be! Devil whom the faith of my fathers contrasted with God and the Church. I will act as spokesman for you and will demand nothing of you.'... The Nihilist, since he usually believes in neither God nor Satan, may think it mere cleverness to defend, in his fight against God, the age-old enemy of God; but while he may think he is doing no more than playing with words, he is actually speaking the truth. De Maistre, and later Donosto Cortes, writing in a day when the Church of Rome was more aware of the meaning of the Revolution than it is now, and was still capable of taking a strong stand against it, called the Revolution a Satanic manifestation; and historians smile at them. Fewer, perhaps, smile today when the same phrase is applied - though rarely with full seriousness even now - to National Socialism or Bolshevism; and some may even begin to suspect that there exist forces and causes that have somehow escaped the attention of their enlightened gaze." (*Nihilism*, Forestville, Ca.; St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1994, pp. 72-73)

The satanic, essentially antichristian nature of Soviet power was explicitly recognized by Patriarch Tikhon and the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in January, 1918. The anathema which they imposed on the regime and its co-workers has never been revoked by the True Church. This is as much as to say that Bolshevism is at least part of the beast established by the dragon, and not an authority in the apostolic sense of the word (Romans 13.1).[287] Many believe that the Soviet Union is not really dead even now, but lives on in its present ex-communist rulers. Certainly, its present leader, Putin, appears to be attempting a revival of Soviet power in another form – that is, combining the ideals of the February and October revolutions with Orthodoxy! Back has come the red flag, the music of the Soviet national anthem and the praises of Stalin – all in a blasphemous union with the crosses, cassocks and cupolas of the Orthodox Church!

13.5-7. And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, and those that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them; and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

This passage echoes two from the Prophet Daniel, one of which probably refers to the collective Antichrist, Soviet power, and the other to the personal Antichrist.

First: **And he shall do according to his will, and the king shall be exalted and magnify himself against every god, and shall speak great swelling words, and shall prosper until the indignations shall be accomplished; for it is coming to an end. And he shall not regard any gods of his fathers, nor the desire of women, neither shall he regard any deity: for he shall magnify himself above all. And he shall honour the god of forces** (Daniel 11.36-38).

This figure is called **the king of the north**, and he eventually comes to grief in a war with **the king of the south** in **the land of Sabaeim** (a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew), which is probably Israel. In this fate he resembles Gog and Magog, whom we have identified earlier with (neo-) Soviet Russia. This identification becomes stronger when we consider the atheism of the king of the north (**neither shall he regard any deity)**, his worship of naked power (**the god of forces)**, and his blasphemy (**great**

[287] As Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava put it: "The Bolsheviks are in essence antichristian, and there is no way that they can be recognized as being established by God" (*The Letters of Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava and Pereyaslavl*, Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1976, p. 18 (in Russian); translated in *Selected Letters*, Liberty: St. John of Kronstadt Press, 1989, p. 36). Again, Metropolitan Philaret of New York wrote: "In 1918 the [Russian] Church anathematised all the co-workers of communism, and in 1927 she herself [that part of the Russian Church led by Metropolitan Sergius of Nizhni-Novgorod] entered into the company of these co-workers and began to praise the God-fighting authorities - to praise the red beast of which the Apocalypse speaks." (Letter to Priest N., June 26 / July 9, 1980 (in Russian).)

swelling words). For many powers have blasphemed against God and persecuted the faithful at times; but none before Soviet Communism took blasphemy and the destruction of faith in God as their aim and raison d'etre. Soviet power was nothing if not blasphemous, being the first power in history to proclaim atheism as its official creed. On May 1, 1932, Stalin even went so far as to proclaim a five-year-plan whose aim was the complete elimination of the name of God from the land. Soviet power blasphemed not only **against God** (the Father) and **His name** (Christ), but also against **His tabernacle** (the Church[288]) and **those that dwell in heaven** - the saints, whose relics were subjected to sacrilege and destruction. It was given victory over Christian armies in the civil war, and later acquired power over the whole world through its vast armies of spies and fellow-travellers, and through the blackmail it exerted by the threat of nuclear war.

However, the passage under consideration from the Apocalypse still more closely echoes another word from Daniel: **Behold, there were eyes as the eyes of a man in this horn, and a mouth speaking great things** (7.8). And again: **That horn, which had eyes, and a mouth speaking great things, and his look was greater than the rest. I beheld, and that horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; until the Ancient of Days came, and He gave judgement to the saints of the Most High; and the time came on, and the saints possessed the Kingdom** (7.20-22). This figure, the **little horn** which springs up amidst the ten horns of the beast and destroys three of them, is unanimously identified by Christian Tradition with the personal Antichrist (see the commentary on 13.2 above and 17.12-13 below).

We may conclude that from verse 5 at least the seer has stopped talking about the collective Antichrist, and has begun to speak about the personal Antichrist, who incarnates in himself all the evil qualities of his predecessors and is their personal culmination and apotheosis. He makes war with the saints and overcomes them, and his kingdom is universal. And he is defeated, not by any human enemy or king, but by Christ Himself coming to judge the world as **the Ancient of Days**, Who **because of the voice of the great words which that horn spoke** sees that **the wild beast is slain and destroyed and his body give to be burnt with fire** (Daniel 7.9,11).

13.8-10. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

"Only those will bow down to the Antichrist whose names are not written in the book of life by the Lamb. Only by patience and faith will the saints be

[288] "The **tabernacle of God** is the dwelling of God the Word in the flesh - that is, His incarnation and repose in the saints, against whom - just as against the angels - the beast will direct his blasphemy" (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

able to defend themselves against the Antichrist. And they are consoled by St. John with the assurance that **he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword**, that is, that a righteous recompense awaits the Antichrist." (Archbishop Averky)

We may conclude that the first beast is political and/or military power in the service of the devil, or *the collective Antichrist*. The seven heads are probably: the five great pre-Christian pagan empires, the pagan Roman Empire (in its antichristian aspect, as opposed to its "restraining" aspect) and, probably, the Soviet empire (perhaps also the Muslim empire), which is the head that receives a near-fatal wound but recovers. We shall return to a fuller discussion of the first beast, and in particular of his ten horns, in the commentary on chapter 17.

The personal Antichrist will be **the eighth** head**,** that one which **is of the seven, and goeth into perdition** (17.11). As Tikhomirov writes: "The Antichrist is the heir of that general historical statehood which before him had seven great manifestations, while this beast himself, that is, the Antichrist, is **the eighth, and is of the seven** (17.11), that is, of the same character as they…

"He will put an end to that social-political revolution which men have accomplished, and will bring about a restoration of historical statehood. And men, worn out by the woes engendered by this revolution, will joyfully welcome the restoration of order brought about by the Antichrist and will say: **who is like unto the beast?** In this respect the Antichrist is a conservative counter-revolutionary. But on the other hand he will appear before the world with a completely *new idea* that is incomparably more revolutionary than the one he abolished. He will lead humanity to *a revolution in the bases of the world's existence*, so as to acquire in the world divine significance and power and satisfy his thirst for earthly goods by that limitless might which this usurpation of God's power gives…

"He restores statehood and order, becomes king, and ten kings arise at the same time as him. But his programme of action is a mystical and magical mission – the conquest of humanity in his person as the highest authority over all the powers of the world. However, the very highest power is the dragon (Satan), who gave the Antichrist **his power, and his throne, and all authority**. The whole earth **will worship the Dragon, who gave power to the beast**, but will also worship the beast himself. It is evident that, in constructing his programme, the Antichrist guesses the spirit of the time. Taking all factors into account, we can see that at that time a mystical belief must reign in humanity, on the basis of which people will begin to consider God to be a power which is harmful for them, but will consider the devil to be a benevolent power, while with regard to themselves they will be filled with the assurance that man can become the highest power in the universe, can struggle with God and overthrow His lordship. How the people of 'the last times' will provide weapons for themselves in this struggle we cannot now clearly represent, but it is clear that these will be *magical* weapons. As an

analogy, we can point to the cabbalistic invocations of angels, whom a magician can force to do what he requires. We can even point to the 'great souls' or 'great adepts' of occultism ruling all the powers of nature. In the times of the Antichrist a complete doctrine of these magical visions will evidently be developed, a doctrine whose foundations were probably laid by the adulterous Whore and completed by the Antichrist."[289]

[289] Tikhomirov, op. cit., pp. 580, 581, 582.

3. The False Prophet

13.11-12. And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and those who dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

"In these verses St. John speaks of the helper of the Antichrist - the false prophet - and his activity. This is also a beast, in Greek θηριον, which signifies a beast whose beastly nature is especially manifest, as for example in wild animals - the hyena, the jackal, the tiger. But he is depicted not as coming out of the sea like the first one, but out of the earth. This signifies that all his feelings and conceptions are entirely earthly, of a sensuous nature. He will have **two horns like a lamb**. In the explanation of St. Andrew, this is so as to 'cover with lamb's skin the murderous nature of a hidden wolf, and because in the beginning he will strive to have an image of piety'. St. Irenaeus of Lyons says that this is 'the weapon-bearer of the Antichrist and the false prophet'...

"Imitating the Lord Jesus Christ, he will use for the establishment of the authority of the Antichrist two powers - the power of the word and the power of miracles. But he will speak **like a dragon**, that is, blasphemously; and the fruit of his speaking will be atheism and extreme impiety. For the deception of men he will begin to perform great wonders so that he can bring down fire from heaven.

"The forerunner of the apostate - the false Christ - will perform everything through sorcery and deceit for the deception of men, so that the Antichrist might be considered as God, being the glorious performer of such miracles and worthy of undoubted glory, like St. John the Baptist, who brought believers to the Saviour; for he also, for the deception of men, will strive to imitate the truth. Therefore it is not at all astonishing that for deceived eyes fire will be seen coming down from heaven, since from the history of Job we know that, by God's permission, fire came down from heaven by the activity of Satan and burned his flock." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

Hieromartyr Victorinus writes: "He [the Antichrist] will lust after no women, and acknowledge no God of his fathers. For he will be unable to beguile the people of the circumcision unless he appears as the champion of the law. Nor will he summon the saints to the worship of idols, but only to accept circumcision, should he succeed in leading any astray. Lastly, he will so act that he will be called Christ by them. The false prophet will contrive to have a golden statue set up to him in the Temple of Jerusalem. The raising of the dead to life is mentioned among the wonders wrought by this false prophet."[290]

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[290] St. Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*.

A somewhat different, but not incompatible interpretation to the above would see in the second beast, or false prophet - *false science*. Although science represents itself as the enemy of all magic and superstition, some of its over-arching theories, such as the theory of evolution, are as superstitious, magical - and undemonstrable - as the most primitive pagan theories of the universe. False science is a beast **coming up out of the earth** because its origin is earthly, in the striving of man to conquer the earth.

Moreover, the effect of science on the minds of modern men is quite comparable with that of magic on the minds of the ancients. Thus in St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher's prophecy about the twentieth century, the Antichrist is described as possessing the power of working miracles which we recognize to be the "miracles" of modern science, such as that of enabling one man to talk to another over very great distances (the telephone), that of flying in the air like a bird (the aeroplane) and of diving into the sea like a fish (the submarine). And St. Nilus goes on to say that the Antichrist "will so complete science with vanity that it will go off the right path and lead people to lose faith in the existence of God in Three Persons" - a prophecy that has been abundantly fulfilled in our time.[291]

For since the time of Galileo's famous debate with the Pope on the shape of the earth's surface, "educated opinion" has tended to assume that where there is a conflict between science and religion, science must be right and religion wrong; which has naturally led to an undermining of the authority of religion and the passing of the mantle of infallibility from the papacy to science. Rarely, therefore, has the educated man won through to the perception of the scientist and theologian, Professor I.M. Andreyev: "Only with a superficial knowledge do there arise *false* contradictions between faith and knowledge, between religion and science. With a deeper knowledge these false contradictions disappear without a trace... A broad, scientific and philosophical education not only does not hinder faith in God, but makes it easier, because the whole arsenal of scientific-philosophical thought is natural apologetic material for religious faith. Moreover, honest knowledge often has a methodical opportunity to uncover corruptions of faith and exposing superstitions, whether religious or scientific-philosophical."[292]

However, the legitimate study of the material creation has tended to go with an over-emphasis on material things and a deification of human reason. This was the case with the first scientists and technologists of the human race, who were descendants of Cain (Genesis 5.17-22). And it was so also at the beginning of the modern age, when "the prophet of the scientific revolution", Francis Bacon, declared that science was like the knowledge of the essence of creatures which Adam had before the fall.

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[291] St. Nilus, in *Orthodox Christian Witness* (Seattle), September 25, 1978. The invention of the telephone was also prophesied by St. Cosmas of Aitolia. See Metropolitan Augustine, op. cit., p. 351.

[292] Andreyev, "Christian Truth and Scientific Knowledge", *The Orthodox Word*, March-April, 1977.

Now it is true that before the fall, as St. Ambrose of Milan writes, "God granted [us] the power of being able to discern by the application of sober logic the species of each and every object, in order that [we] may be induced to form a judgement on all of them".[293] But the fall has changed everything; and science, however "pure", objective and disinterested it may appear to be (we remember that the second beast looks like an innocent lamb), is still a product of fallen men with fallen minds having an innate tendency towards error and deception. For, as the wise Solomon says, **Hardly do we divine the things that are on earth, and the things that are close at hand we find with labour; but the things that are in heaven who ever yet traced out? and who ever gained knowledge of Thy counsel, except Thou gavest wisdom and sentest Thy Holy Spirit from on high?** (Wisdom 9.16).

Moreover, there are certain things which must forever remain beyond the range of empirical knowledge and verification - the beginning and end of the material creation, for example. For, as the Lord said to Job: **Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?** (Job 38.4). Science, however, - or rather, false science - denies any such limits to its competence; and so, by the just judgement of God, it proceeds further and further away from the knowledge of the greater mysteries of the universe - of God, of the soul, of the origins and destiny of creation, - while puffing itself up by its knowledge of the lesser mysteries, and paying no heed to the fact that its discoveries are bringing, not good, but evil to the human race.

Now the scientific revolution began in Protestant countries, where "the scientific spirit" applied to matters of the Faith was taken to justify the rejection of all traditions and doctrines that could not be clearly established on the basis of the Holy Scriptures alone. No heed was paid to the fact that Scripture itself points to *the Church* as **the pillar and ground of the truth** (I Timothy 3.15) and to *Holy Tradition* as the essential complement of Scripture (II Thessalonians 2.15, 3.6). Instead, even the most ignorant Christian was deemed capable of unlocking the mysteries of the Holy Spirit unaided.

During the eighteenth century, the rationalist attack on faith took a further massive stride with the philosophical doctrine of Deism, according to which God was granted the function of First Cause of the universe, but was excluded from the everyday working of nature, which was to be explained exclusively in terms of the mechanical laws discovered by science. With God banished to the heavens, and human empirical reason reigning supreme on earth, it was not long before reason itself was deified. This took place in a literal fashion during the French revolution.

But a vital stone was missing from this latter-day Tower of Babel: a doctrine of origins. This was supplied by Darwin's theory of evolution. Man, according to this theory, is the product of the fortuitous evolution of

[293] St. Ambrose, *On Paradise*, 11.

inanimate matter into higher and higher forms of life. When combined with other materialist pseudo-sciences, such as Freudian psychoanalysis, Marxist economics and "big bang physics", the theory of evolution expands into a universal theory of origins, universal evolutionism. Thus "by universal evolutionism," wrote C.S. Lewis, "I mean the belief that the very formula of universal process is from imperfect to perfect, from small beginnings to great endings, from the rudimentary to the elaborate, the belief which makes people find it natural to thing that morality springs from savage taboos, adult sentiment from infantile sexual maladjustments, thought from instinct, mind from matter, organic from inorganic, cosmos from chaos. This is perhaps the deepest habit of mind in the contemporary world. It seems to me immensely implausible..."[294]

Thus science, in striving to progress beyond the bounds of any possible scientific verification, has retrogressed to the state of pre-scientific, magical superstition, when the sun-god and earth-goddess were seen to be the causes of creation. And man, in striving to make his mind, made in the image of God, the measure of all things, including God, has reduced it to the image of the beast: **Man, being in honour, did not understand; he is compared to the mindless cattle, and is become like unto them** (Psalm 48.21). Thus St. Basil the Great's estimate seems not far from the mark: "Have not those who give themselves up to vain science the eyes of owls? The sight of the owl, piercing during the night-time, is dazzled by the splendour of the sun. Thus the intelligence of these men, so keen to contemplate vanities, is blind in the presence of the true light."[295]

And yet we must remember that it is not true science that we are talking about here, which simply means knowledge acquired through observation and logical reasoning. Rather, we are talking about *false* science, **science falsely so-called**, in St. Paul's phrase (I Timothy 6.20), or what Dostoyevsky's Shatov calls "*half-science*, that most terrible scourge of mankind, worse than pestilence, famine, or war, and quite unknown until our present century. Half-science is a despot such as has never been known before. A despot that has its own priests and slaves, a despot before whom everyone prostrates himself with love and superstitious dread, such as has been quite inconceivable until now, before whom science itself trembles and surrenders in a shameful way."[296]

Such a false prophet as science, with its extraordinary hold over the minds of contemporary men, could not fail to be used by the Antichrist, that **fool** who **hath said in his heart: There is no God** (Psalm 13,1, 52.1) - or, at any rate,

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[294] Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?", in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, New York: Macmillan, 1949.

[295] St. Basil, *On the Six Days of Creation*, Homily 8. And in another place he writes of the pagan Greek scientists: "Their terrible condemnation will be the greater for all this worldly wisdom, since, seeing so clearly into vain sciences, they have wilfully shut their eyes to the knowledge of the truth" (1,4).

[296] Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, translated by David Magarshack, Penguin books, p. 257.

no God but me. And so it was that the world's first officially atheist state, the Soviet Union, proclaimed itself to be the first state to be founded on purely scientific principles - the principles of dialectical materialism (i.e. universal evolutionism).

Indeed, it is this second beast who **exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him**; for, as Shatov says, "Socialism is bound to be atheistic because it has proclaimed from the very first that it intends to organise itself exclusively on the principles of science and reason."[297]

Nor, as we said before, is this emphasis on science and reason incompatible with the false prophet's use of *magic*; for rationalism and magic are closely related in that both are attempts by man to master nature for his own selfish ends, without reference to the true Master of nature, God. Science is the modern intellectual's magic, performing much the same functions, and evoking much the same superstitious credulity. Thus what is the belief that all things came into existence by evolution from a tiny speck of super-hot matter if not an extreme form of irrational superstition?

13.13. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven in the sight of men.

Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov writes: "It is not to be wondered at that the wonders of the Antichrist will be received unquestioningly and with enthusiasm by the apostates from Christianity, the enemies of the truth, the enemies of God: they have prepared themselves to accept, openly and actively, the messenger and weapon of Satan, his teaching, all his actions, having in a timely manner entered into communion with Satan in spirit... The signs of the Antichrist will appear especially in the air: it is in this area that Satan is especially dominant. The signs will act mainly on the sense of sight, enchanting and deceiving it. St. John the Theologian contemplated in a revelation the events that are to precede his death, and said that the Antichrist would do great works, and **maketh fire come down from heaven in the sight of men.** Scripture indicates this sign as the highest of the signs of the Antichrist, and the place of this sign is the air: it will be a majestic and terrible spectacle. The signs of the Antichrist will supplement his crafty behaviour: they will persuade the majority of men to follow him. The opponents of the Antichrist will be considered to be disturbers of the peace, enemies of the common good and order, and will be subjected to open and hidden

[297] Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, p. 256. The physicist Vladimir Trostnikov writes: "True, well-known scientists do not usually tolerate direct attacks against religion. But this cautiousness is explained, not by their wavering, but by a desire to serve the cause of atheism as effectively as possible. You know, people are always more likely to believe, not the man who gets heated and thereby betrays his partiality, but the man who gives the impression of being an impartial third party. It is precisely this role that our scientists take upon themselves. But their verdicts are always in favour of one side." ("The Role and Place of the Baptism of Rus' in the General European Spiritual Process of the Second Millenium of Christian History", *Orthodox Russia*, N 19 (1400), October 1/14, 1989 (in Russian)).

persecution. Cunning spirits will be sent throughout the world and will elicit a generally exalted opinion of the Antichrist among men, a general enthusiasm, an irresistible attraction for him. Scripture has portrayed in many ways the weight of the final persecution of Christianity and the cruelty of the persecutor. A decisive and definite feature is the name that Scripture gives to this terrible man: he is called **the beast**, since the fallen angel is called **the serpent**. Both names faithfully depict the character of both enemies of God. One acts more secretly, the other - more openly; but to the beast, who is similar to all beasts, and combines in himself their various kinds of savagery, **the serpent [dragon] gave his power, and his seat, and great authority.** The saints of God will suffer a terrible temptation: the cunning, hypocrisy and wonders of the persecutor will increase, so as to deceive and seduce them; subtle persecutions and restrictions thought up and covered over with crafty inventiveness, and the unlimited power of the torturer, will place them in the most difficult position: their small number will seem insignificant in the face of the whole of humanity and will give their opinion the appearance of particular feebleness; general derision, hatred, slanders, restrictions and violent death will become their lot. Only with the special cooperation of Divine grace, and under its guidance, will the elect of God be able to withstand the enemy of God, confessing the Lord Jesus before him and before men."[298]

Among the beast's miracles, according to St. Ephraim the Syrian, will be the moving of mountains and the transfer of a mountainous island from the sea onto dry land in the sight of all. But "everyone who has the fear of God in himself, and the eyes of whose heart are filled with light, will know exactly that neither did the mountain move from its place nor did the island move from the sea onto dry land."[299]

13.14-15. And deceiveth those that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to those that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by the sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

"He will deceive those whose hearts have their constant dwellings upon earth; but he will not deceive the senses of those who have acquired a dwelling in the heavens - they will be made perfectly firm by the prophecy of his coming... There are accounts of how the demons, by sorcery, have often spoken by means of images, statues, water, etc., and even perhaps through dead bodies... Therefore there is nothing unfitting in the fact that the arm-bearer or forerunner of the Antichrist, acting with the help of demons, should

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[298] Bishop Ignatius, *On Signs and Wonders*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1960 (in Russian).
[299] St. Ephraim the Syrian, *Sermon 29;* in Barsov, op. cit., p. 185.

make an image of the beast and falsely show it to be speaking." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

But again, science can imitate these miracles. St. Cosmas wrote in the eighteenth century: "There shall appear a box of the devil which will stupefy the world and whose horns shall be on the roof." He was clearly referring to television, which can make an image of the beast and of almost anything else - an image, moreover, which speaks. With the advent of computer and laser and robot technology, the situation portrayed in these verses seems still closer to realization. Some computer experts are even referring to the most complex computers of the near future as "living creatures" with capacities far exceeding those of men. Computers are now able to create "virtual reality", the appearance of real men and real situations. And there are some indications that children brought up in the computer age sometimes to regard take the creations of computer technologists for living beings. Some scientists are even talking about a time when computers will be talking to each other without the intervention of man...

These signs in the sky may not be unrelated to the UFO phenomenon. As Fr. Seraphim Rose writes: "the 'message' of the UFOs is: prepare for Antichrist; the 'saviour' of the apostate world is coming to rule it. Perhaps he himself will come in the air, in order to complete his impersonation of Christ (Matthew 24.30; Acts 1.11); perhaps only the 'visitors from outer space' will land publicly in order to offer 'cosmic' worship of their master; perhaps the **fire from heaven** (Revelation 13.13) will be only a part of the great demonic spectacles of the last times."[300]

Still more frightening is the spectre of genetically engineered supermen, or the formation of hybrid demon-men like the giants of Noah's time, which some claim is taking place through the abductions of human beings by demonic aliens appearing to them from UFOs. The Antichrist himself, as indicated above, may be born through a kind of demonic genetic engineering.[301] Thus we may suppose that the false prophet will use both science and magic; for as science emerged out of magic at the beginning of the modern period, so they will tend to unite again for the glorification of the Antichrist at the end of time.

13.16-17. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads; and that no man might buy or sell, except he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

St. Hippolytus writes: "Through his evil stratagems and extolling of himself over the servants of God [the beast] wishes to root out and drive them

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[300] Rose, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*. Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1979, pp. 141-142.
[301] See Appendix.

out of the world. And above all because they will not give him glory, he orders everyone everywhere to set up temples, so that none of the saints can buy or sell unless they first offer sacrifices on them. This is the meaning of the seal placed on the right hand. As regards the seal on the forehead, this will be in order that they should all be crowned, and should bear on themselves the fiery crown, not of life, but of death. For that is how Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian king, acted against the Jews, being one of the successors of Alexander of Macedon. In those days he, being uplifted in heart, issued an order that everyone should place altars in front of their gates and offer sacrifices, and, having wound ivy round their heads, should celebrate in honour of Bacchus: but those who refused to obey he tortured and wore out before ordering that they be given over to death (I Maccabees 1.9,11). For this he himself received a fitting punishment from the Lord, the righteous Judge and Providential God, for he died after being eaten up by worms. He who wishes to read a detailed account of this can find it in the book of the Maccabees."[302]

In his vision of 1908, St. John of Kronstadt saw the seal of the Antichrist to be the red star of Communism.[303] Similarly, the famous Confessor Sergius Nilus quoted *Izvestia*, which said that Metropolitan Sergius' declaration of July 16/29, 1927, whereby the official church entered into submission to the communists, was an attempt "to construct a cross in such a way that it would look like a hammer to a worker, and like a sickle to a peasant". "In other words," said Nilus, "to exchange the cross for the Soviet seal, **the seal of the beast** (Rev. 13.16)."[304]

Again, one of the victims of Communism, Hieromartyr Bishop Damascene of Glukhov, writes: "Why is it that the seal of the Antichrist, as St. John the Theologian affirms, will be placed not upon the forehead and the hand simultaneously, but upon the forehead *or* the hand? Likewise, St. Andrew, archbishop of Caesarea, writes: 'He will strive so that the mark might be place upon everyone... In some it will be on the right hand, so as to instruct those who have been deceived to be bold in their deception and darkness.' This will occur because at that time there will be people who will affirm that it is possible and permissible to recognize the God-fighting authority of the Antichrist if only one remains a Christian in one's soul. From such ones the Antichrist will not demand that they share his way of thinking; in other words, upon all such ones he will not place the seal on their forehead, but will demand of them only the recognition of his authority, which is, according to St. Hippolytus, the seal on the hand, since through the recognition of the human authority which will be God-fighting and against God, lawless and filled with every impiety, a Christian by this very fact will cut off from himself every possibility of doing good and righteous deeds, for in his faith there will be missing the chief sign of uprightness - the confession of God as God and the recognition of Him as the Being Who stand above all. All such

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[302] St. Hippolytus of Rome, *On Christ and the Antichrist.*
[303] St. John of Kronstadt, in Fomin, op. cit., p. 138.
[304] Nilus, "Letter on Sergianism", *Russian Pastor*, 28-29, II/III, 1997, p. 180 ®.

ones, even though they might bear the name of Christian, in very deed will be, according to the works of their hands, true servants of the Antichrist, who has deceived them by the worship of his image, which is the mark of the beast. Repentance is impossible for such ones, according to the teaching of the Holy Church; and it is impossible only because the seal of Christ and the seal of the Antichrist are incompatible with each other, and the acceptance of the one drives out the presence of the other. The banishing of the Grace of the Holy Spirit through the mark of the beast fills the heart of all such ones with the first sign - fearfulness - which will bring them to an easy destruction. St. Hippolytus writes: 'On the contrary, if anyone is deprived of the Holy Spirit, that is, if he does not have upon himself or has lost the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit which was given in Holy Chrismation, he will fight with fear in a cowardly manner, will hide, will be afraid of the present temporal death, will conceal himself from the sword, will not endure chastisement, since he is constantly thinking about this,' etc.

"This is the essence of the matter, we emphasize it: 'Through the acceptance of a human authority that is against God and God-fighting, lawless and filled with all manner of impiety, - in other words, in our time of Soviet power, - 'the Christian will thereby cut off in himself every possibility of doing good and righteous deeds, for in his faith there will be missing the chief sign of righteousness - the confession of God as God and the recognition of Him as the Being Who stand above all. All such ones, even though they might bear the name of Christian, in very deed will be, according to the works of their hands, true servants of the Antichrist, who has deceived them by the worship of his image, which is the mark of the beast.' 'The seal of Christ and the seal of the Antichrist are incompatible with each other, and the acceptance of the one drives out the presence of the other' - in other words, Orthodoxy, Communism and every religion are incompatible, because the one excludes the other."[305]

Such was the mark of the beast in the time of the collective Antichrist. In the time of the personal Antichrist it is bound to be more subtle, and at the same time, perhaps, more literal. Thus the technology now exists whereby all payments for food, etc. can be made by electronic machines reading numbers, laser-printed identity cards or bar-codes, imprinted invisibly on the forehead or the right hand. Perhaps the forehead and the right hand will be chosen because it is by raising the right hand to the forehead that the sign of the Cross is made. So the seal of the Antichrist will be directly opposed to the seal of Christ, the sign of the Cross.

St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher prophesied: "The Antichrist will begin to seal people with his seal as if in order by this sign to save them from woes (for only he who has the seal, according to the Apocalypse, will be sold bread). Many will die on the roads. People will become like birds of prey hurling

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[305] St. Damascene of Glukhov, in I.M. Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1982, pp. 222-223.

themselves on rotting matter. They will devour the bodies of the dead [which happened already in Soviet times]. But of what kind will be the people who will devour the dead? Those who are sealed with the seal of the Antichrist; Christians, even though they will not be given or sold bread because they do not have the seal on themselves, will not eat corpses; but those who have been sealed, in spite of the availability of bread for them, will begin to devour them. Finally, he who is sealed will himself be killed by the antitype: on the seal will be written the following: 'I am yours.' 'Yes, you are mine.' 'I go willingly, not by force.' 'And I accept you in accordance with your will, and not by force.' These are four utterances, or inscriptions, which will be written in the middle of this accursed seal...

"But when the accursed glory will see Enoch and Elijah preaching and telling the people that they should not receive the seal of the Antichrist, he will order them to be seized. But they will continue to persuade people not to receive the seal of the Antichrist; they will say that he who shows patience and is not sealed with the seal of the Antichrist will be saved, and God will unfailingly receive him into Paradise for the sake of the single fact that he did not receive the seal. And let everyone sign himself with the honourable cross, making the sign at every hour, for the sign of the cross frees man from the torments of hell; but the seal of the Antichrist leads man to the torments of hell. If you are hungry and want to eat, be patient for a little while and God, seeing your patience, will send you help from on high; you will be filled with life through the help of God the Most High. But if you are not patient, you will be sealed with the seal of this impure king, and will then repent of this.

"People will say to Enoch and Elijah, 'Why then are those who received the seal thankful to Antichrist?' Enoch and Elijah will say: 'They are thankful, but who is really thankful? It is not the people who give thanks, but only the seal itself.' What is their thankfulness? It is that Satan has entered into them, is conceived in man's feeling, and man does not know what has happened to him. The one who is sealed with the imprint of Antichrist becomes a demon; even thought he asserts that he feels neither hunger nor thirst, he craves food and drink even more, and not only more, but seven times more than you. Be patient for only a little while. Do you not see rather that he who receives the seal of Antichrist will not live (he is dead in spirit, and eternal suffering awaits him)? Is it possible you too desire to perish with the seal in eternal suffering, there to be with those, who were sealed with it? - where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth?'"[306]

13.18. Here is wisdom. Let him who hath understanding calculate the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man; and his number is (666) six hundred three score and six.

[306] St. Nilus, in Archimandrite Pantaleimon, *A Ray of Light*, Jordanville, 1996, pp. 83-84.

“It is the number of a man, that we may not suppose him, according to the opinion of some, to be either devil or demon, but one from among men, in whom Satan is to dwell altogether bodily.” (The Venerable Bede).

"Many attempts have been made, even from ancient times, to guess the meaning and sense of these words, but they have produced no definite conclusion. Most often they have attempted to discover the name of the Antichrist by putting together the letters which are equivalent to the number. For example, according to St. Irenaeus' surmise, the beast's number 666 is produced by putting together the numerical equivalents of the letters of the name 'Latinos' or 'Titan'. Certain have found the number of the beast in the name of Julian the Apostate; later interpreters - in the title of the Pope of Rome - Vicarius Filii Dei, Vicar of the Son of God; in the name Napoleon, etc. Our schismatics tried to extract the number 666 from the name of Patriarch Nicon. Reflecting on the name of the Antichrist, St. Andrew says: 'If it were necessary to know his name, the seer would have revealed it; but it was not pleasing to the grace of God that this baneful name should be written in the Divine Book.' If one pursues the words, then, according to the opinion of St. Hippolytus, one can find many names, both proper and common, that correspond to this number.[307]" (Archbishop Averky)

St. Irenaeus writes: "That is, six times a hundred, six times ten, and six units. [He gives this] as a summing up of the whole of that apostasy which has taken place during six thousand years...

“We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of the Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed at this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision… But he indicates the number of the name, that when this man comes we may avoid him, being aware who he is: the name, however, is suppressed, because it is not worthy of being proclaimed by the Holy Spirit."[308]

St. Jerome writes: "When this beast comes, in him will be collected to the maximum degree all lawlessness, all falsehood and all deception, in order that the whole force of apostasy, concentrated in him, can be cast into the furnace and burned.

"It is precisely for that reason that his name will be 666, that is, six hundreds, six tens and six units. For in him alone will be concentrated all the abomination that existed until the flood because of the apostasy of the angels. You know, Noah was exactly 600 years old when the flood came and swept

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[307] Thus if one gives to the letters of the Latin alphabet numerical values of multiples of six (A=6, B=12, etc.), one obtains the following words as equivalent to 666: "Computer", "Mark of Beast", "Diluvium" (the Latin word for "flood") and "New York".

[308] St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 28, 30.

away the whole world that had rebelled against God - because of the unbelievably shameless and depraved tribe that lived in Noah's time.

"In the same way the Antichrist will sum up in himself all the diabolical power and all the cunning of all the idols that have existed from the flood to our days; and he will kill the prophets and destroy every trace of right judgement and justice.

"Furthermore, the statue erected by Nebuchadnezzar was sixty cubits high and six cubits wide. And since Ananias, Azariah and Misael did not want to worship this statue they were cast into the fiery furnace, which prophetically symbolizes the time of the last persecutions. For this statue symbolized the coming Antichrist himself, who will want everybody to worship him alone.

"And so, the 600 years of Noah's age at the moment of the onset of the flood sent as a punishment for apostasy, and the number of cubits of the statue, because of which those faithful to God were cast into the fiery furnace, make up the figure of the name of the Antichrist, in whom will be collected all the apostasy of 6000 years and all the iniquities, all the injustice, all the trickery and all the false prophecy and deception, for the destruction of which the fiery flood will be sent upon the earth."

The number six is associated with the idea of completion, since the world was created in six days, and with man, since man himself was created on the sixth day. However, man also fell on the sixth day and hour, so it also signifies apostasy - the apostasy of mankind before the flood reached its culmination in the 600th year of Noah. Thus "600 signifies the fervent pursuit of sin through the misuse of creation which was made in six days, and also that in the 600th year of Noah the earth was inundated." (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

After the flood, man again apostasised, and this apostasy reached its completion when Christ was crucified on the sixth day and hour, which is why there was darkness over the earth from the sixth hour to the ninth hour (Mark 15.33). But the apostasy of man in general, and of the Jewish race in particular, will reach a still higher degree of apostasy during the reign of the Antichrist. Therefore the number 666 may be said to signify the three stages of man's apostasy, from the fall of Adam to the Crucifixion of Christ to the tyranny of the Antichrist.

However, the number seven signifies the rest from the works of fallen nature and the reversal of apostasy; for Christ by His resting in the tomb and descent into hell on the seventh day destroyed the works of the devil.[309]

[309] Fr. Stefan Krasovitsky writes: "If the number 6 signifies the perfection of creation, then the number 7, symbolizing the day of God's Repose, signifies the Presence of God, that is, the Meaning of Perfection, its Significance, Centre, which remains in Repose, but without Which everything that must be around It is deprived of Meaning... And so the number 666 signifies

Finally, the eighth day represents the coming of eternity and the final salvation, sanctification and transfiguration of nature. For Christ rose from the dead on the eighth day, and the numerical equivalent of the name "Jesus", meaning "Saviour", is 888.[310]

Recently, attention has focussed on the fact that the technology exists in several countries to imprint information in the form of the number 666 on the right hand or forehead of every individual citizen. Thus P. Budzilovich writes: "In the U.S.A., which is the leader of the builders of the 'New World Order', all technical preparations have now been made for the attainment of global control. The National Security Agency already has a super-powerful computer created specially for this aim (Texe Marr 'Project LUCID - the Beast Universal Human Control System', Austin, TX, 1996). Work on the creation of this computer and the required mathematical software has been conducted as part of a project with the code-name 'Project LUCID' (the abbreviation LUCID means bright, radiant; whence 'Lucifer', Satan - light-bearing). They have also worked out means of 'placing the seal' of the beast - biological microcircuits, which are planned to be incorporated into the right hand or the head (at the moment, as reported in 'Phoenix Letter' for March, 1997, the governments of Denmark, the Philippines and Trinidad are taking steps to introduce such microcircuits to check the identities of their citizens, referring to the success of this programme in the U.S.A. Although this work is being carried out in secret in the U.S.A.). The microcircuits will contain all-encompassing information about their bearers, including photographs, fingerprints, feet, snaps of the irises, information about their financial situation, health, etc. It goes without saying that every individual in the whole world will be given a unique registration number. At the moment it is suggested that such a number should consist of 18 digits, in three groups, which means... six digits in each group, forming the image of the number 666."[311]

Again, on November 22, 2003 a new product of the company "Caspian", an implantable RFIC payment chip, was unveiled in Paris. The founder and former director of the company, Katherine Albrecht, writes: "The 'VeriPay' chip contains a unique ID number associated with the individual in whom it is embedded. This unique ID number can be linked to credit card or other

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self-perfection in three stages: 1. Personality; 2. 'The Church of the Antichrist; 3. The Personality of the Antichrist." ("The Number '666'", *Straight Path*, N 1 (3), 1992 (in Russian)).

[310] Archimandrite Emmanuel Kalyva, *The Seal of the Antichrist*, Athens, 1989, chapter 5 (in Greek).

[311] "The New World Order in the year 2000?" *Orthodox Russia*, N 9 (1582), May 1/14, 1997, p. 5 (in Russian). See also many issues of the journal of the Athonite zealots, *St. Agathangelos of Esphigmenou* (in Greek).

"Tim Willard, editor of the 'Futurist' magazine, speaks of the biochip in these words: 'The technology behind such a biochip implant is fairly uncomplicated and with a little refinement could be used in a variety of human applications. Conceivably a number could be assigned at birth and follow that person throughout life. Most likely it would be implanted on the back of the right or the left hand so that it would be easy to scan at stores. Then you would simply scan your hand to automatically debit your bank account'" (*Light for the Last Days*, January-March, 1997, pp. 4-5).

payment method and communicated to merchants by merely holding the chipped body part up to an RFIC reader/sales device.

"Though it is not clear which part of the body the company targets for payment chip implantation, my guess is that the upper arm (where the company's 'Verichip' product is currently embedded) would be too cumbersome to wave at a reader device. More likely, the chip will be embedded in an individual's hand or writes to facilitate the 'wave and go' payment system currently possible with the Mobil Speedpass-Timex Wristwatch system."[312]

More recently, Radio Frequency Identification Chips (RFID) have been developed that can be inserted into the skin and can track a person anywhere. Still more recently, a company called Somark has developed an ink tattoo which incorporates the RFID technology…

Now a number or equivalent mark imprinted or tattooed in some such way into the body (and scanned, perhaps, by satellites in space) could indeed be interpreted as a mark given by the second beast, false science.

In this context, the following observation is important: "Usually, when you want to contact someone on the internet, you type the three letters 'www' [for 'worldwide web']... It is fascinating that in the international alphabet, 'w'… is used to translate the Hebrew letter vav into the standard Roman alphabet. Vav, the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, represents the number 6. So, in a sense, when you type the three letters 'www', you are entering the Hebrew equivalent of '666'. We have all known for a long time that the Antichrist will need a global communications system to carry out his evil schemes. Now, we have one with his initials on it."[313]

Another interesting hypothesis is that 666 is the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew letters that make up the phrase "King of the Jews".[314]

However, with regard to all these interpretations we must remember the word of Bishop Photius of Triaditsa: "There are countless theories concerning the secret meaning of the number '666'. But few are they who approach these issues with humility, profundity of thought and, indeed, spirituality! One who understands that the mark of the beast is, alas, inscribed on our hearts will not worry and be disquieted, waiting anxiously for its appearance, for example, in some new change in the official documents and passports that a government may issue. Instead, he will concentrate all of his attention on identifying this mark in the heart, where it is evilly inscribed.

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[312] Albrecht, <newsletter@nocards.org>, 22 November, 2003, in [orthodoxjurisdictions] IT'S HERE. VeriPay, implantable RFID payment chip, unveiled today in…, November 24, 2003.
[313] George Spruksts, "666 & the World Wide Web", Orthodox@listserv. indiana.edu, 15 September, 1997.
[314] Archpriest Boris Molchanoff, "Antichrist", *Orthodox Life,* May-June, 1980, pp. 26-27.

"Few Orthodox faithful, I suspect, realize that their feverish concerns and questions – 'What will the mark look like? Will it not likely be the latest thing in technology, some sort of electronic microchip?' – have their provenance in Protestant texts and Protestant fundamentalistic theology. This kind of speculation cannot be found at the core of the Orthodox Church, and particularly in the theological consensus of the Holy Fathers. Indeed, the truth is that we do not know what form the Mark of the Beast will take. Will it perhaps be a technical process – or perhaps one of the rituals of the false religions of the future world? Perhaps a rite that will blasphemously imitate the Christian rite of Chrismation? We simply do not know. That of which we should be aware is one thing: no outward action and no outward safeguard can guarantee and ensure that we will remain faithful to our Lord. The effectiveness of this mark will be thwarted *only* by our conscience and by our will. It will be powerless to the extent that we are willing to live in a constant state of spiritual effort of conscience and indefatigable struggle against sin, continuously exercising our willpower in standing up for and maintaining our uninterrupted fidelity to Christ – even after falling over and over, or by betraying Him through our feelings, thoughts, words, and deeds.

"No amount of protestation, no organizations and earthly resources directed against passports and the symbol '666' – which is purported, for example, to appear on Russian passports – will save use from the proliferation of this Mark of the Beast. Our sole aim should be the preservation of our fidelity to the Patristic spirit and to Orthodoxy's Tradition…"[315]

Having absorbed this salutary warning, we return to our investigation – but not in search of technological explanations of the Mark based on Protestant speculation, but on purely Orthodox sources from modern times.

One theory is that "666" describes the so-called "Star of David", probably to be identified with the "star of Remphan" mentioned by the Prophet Amos (5.26-27). King Manasseh of Judah introduced the worship of the Phoenician gods Baal (also called Moloch), the god of the sun, to whom children younger than six were offered in whole burnt-sacrifice, and his consort Astarte, the goddess of love and war, whose cult was accompanied by temple prostitution. Their representations are very often accompanied by the six-pointed hexagram, now called the Star of David – although it has nothing to do with King David or the true Israel. The image can be seen to be of two triangles interacting, which represents the sexual union of the male and female divinities, whose cult was probably introduced into Israel from Babylonia via Phoenicia… [316]

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[315] Bishop Photius, "Faithfulness to Christ Will Save Us From the Mark of the Beast", *Orthodox Tradition,* vol. XXVII, no. 1, 2010, pp. 11-12.

[316] See Elena Samborskaya, "Otkrovenie o zvezde. Tajna geksagrammy" (Revelation about the star. The mystery of hexagram), *Sviashchennoe Pisanie* (Holy Scripture), October 11, 2015, http://holyscripture.ru/creative/?t=helena_samborskaya&b=hexagram.

In modern times, this interpretation was introduced on the eve of the revolution bythe Catacomb Church confessor and first publisher of *The Protocols of the Elders of Sion*, Sergius Nilus. He pointed out that the number 6 precedes the number 7, so it can logically signify the time before the beginning of this world, which is represented by the number 7. Therefore the age of Satan, who rebelled against God before the foundation of the world, is logically represented by the number 6. And he went on:

"The symbol or seal of **the mystery of godliness** - of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ - is the honourable Cross of the Lord. The significance and power of this seal is known to every Christian - to the whole Christian race.

"The symbol or seal of **the mystery of iniquity** - of the God-fighting devil, as well as its significance and power (albeit illusory), must be known to every Jew - to the whole of the Jewish people and through it to Masonry, as the ally of Jewry. Their seal will also be the seal of their king and antichrist-god, who **is not** yet, but who **will be** in the nearest future.

"But does such a symbol, such a seal, really exist among the Jews and Masons?...

"*The six-pointed star*, composed of two interlocking, equal-sided similar triangles... Each of the triangles has three sides, three corners and three apexes. Consequently, in the two triangles there will be 6 sides, 6 corners and 6 apexes...

"In the seal of the Antichrist, therefore, the number 6 is repeated three times, that is: 666, which **for fear of the Jews** (John 19.38), for **the reader who understands** (Matthew 24.15) the symbolism of the mystery, could also be represented by the seer of mysteries in writing, as **six hundred and sixty-six**...

"... This star is truly just as sacred a symbol for the Jew (and therefore for the Mason) as the sign of the life-giving Cross is for the Christian.

"This seal which is sacred for Jewry bears the name in the ritual of the Jewish services of 'Mochin-Dovid', which means 'Shield of David'. They put it into the grave of every right-believing Jews, as an earnest of his communion with his 'god' beyond the grave...

"The Masons and the offshoots of the Masonic tree - the theosophists, the occultists, the spiritualists, the gnostics, etc. - attach just as sacred a significance to this seal, but it has another name. It is called: "The Seal of Solomon" or the Cabbalistic "Tetragramma".

"And so the symbol or seal of Judaeo-Masonry, **the synagogue of Satan** of the apostates from Christ and Jewish kahal is the "tetragramma" of the Cabbala.

"If the seal of those who… are preparing a kingdom for the antichrist is the "tetragramma of Solomon" or "Mochin Dovid", then is it not clear that it will also be the seal of the Antichrist himself?

"Will any of those who believe in Christ renounce the Cross of the Lord? Will he agree to replace it with another symbol?

"In no way.

"Nor will the Jews and the Masons renounce their seal, until Israel is converted and **they shall look on Him Whom they have pierced**..."[317]

What is the relationship between the six-pointed star and the five-pointed star? First, the former is drawn as the latter for convenience in writing. But, more important, the five-pointed star was from early times a symbol of Zionism, and more recently - of Communism, whose relationship with each other and with the Antichrist is clear.[318]

Thus those who accept the seal of the Antichrist, the six-pointed star or "shield of David", will be, in a very direct way, proclaiming the false Messiah of the Jews, "the son of David", to be their king, and renouncing the true Messiah and Son of David, Jesus Christ.[319]

St. Nilus the Myrrhgusher says: "When Antichrist places his seal on people their hearts will become as if dead. At the time of the prophesied calamity, Antichrist will begin to seal people with his imprint, as though by this seal to save them from misfortune, for those having this seal, according to Revelation, will be able to buy bread. Many will be dying on the roads. People will become like predatory birds attacking carrion, and will devour dead bodies. But which people will devour the dead? Those who are marked with the seal of Antichrist. Since Christians will not have the seal they will not be able to receive or buy bread and will not devour the dead; but those who are sealed, though they can buy bread, will devour the dead. For, when a man is imprinted with the seal, his heart will become insensitive; not being able to bear hunger, people will carry off corpses, and sitting at the side of any road devour them.

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[317] Nilus, *It is Near, at the Very Door*, Sergiev Posad, 1917, pp. 262-263, 248-250 (in Russian).
[318] Marchevsky, op. cit., pp. 168-169.
[319] The Talmud interprets the verse from Ezekiel: **My servant David shall be king over them** (37.24) to mean that he must be of the seed of David, "the son of David". This is also asserted by the last of the *Protocols*, which says that he will be "the prop of humanity in the person of the supreme lord of all the world of the holy seed of David". In January, 2005 a group of 71 Jewish scholars calling itself the Sanhedrin met to discuss the creation of a Jewish monarchy in the State of Israel. They agreed that Rabbi Yosef Dayan from Psagot had the closest bloodlines to King David. The meeting also discussed the construction of an altar on the Temple Mount to be used for a Passover offering (Yaakov Katz, "Hear ye, hear ye: Sanhedrin seeks David's scion as king", *The Jerusalem Post,* January 12, 2005).

"Finally, the one sealed by the Antichrist will himself be put to death; and on the seal the following will be written: 'I am yours.' - 'Yes, you are mine.' - 'I go of my own free will, not by coercion.' - 'And I receive you by your own will, not by coercion.' These four sayings or inscription will be shown in the center of that accursed seal."[320]

"Why," asks Fr. Oleg Molenko, "will the antichrist, who has great power, demand precisely a voluntary acceptance of his inscription? Because he, in his mad boldness and pride, will want to show himself to be as it were the true God, and that people worship and submit to him, the beast (and so to satan also), consciously and voluntarily, and also that they have also left the true God voluntarily. By this 'voluntarism' in preferring him to the true God he wants to be confirmed in his power over men as it were on the 'lawful' basis of the democratic right of choice. Look what democracy and the right of choice will lead many people to!

"We can explain the threefold alternatives when buying from a practical point of view. The inscription itself will be placed on the skin of the right hand or the skin of the forehead, invisibly for the eyes, by means of a laser or some other modern technical instrument. This will be something like modern plastic cards, only instead of the plastic the skin of the man will be used in the indicated places. So that all other representations (bar-codes, etc.) on other objects beside the forehead and the right hand have no relation to the 'seal' of the antichrist and no significance. The places on the forehead and right hand will not be chosen randomly, although everything will be concealed on the grounds of convenience and expediency. In actual fact it will be chosen in order to take away from the man the power of the sign of the cross and the very possibility of signing himself with the sign of the cross. That is why the reception of the inscription of the beast will be, in addition to everything else, a cross-fighting heresy.

"The representation on the skin, besides the inscription with the name and number of the name of the beast (which alone gives the right to buy and sell) may also contain information about bank accounts and other information on it. In this case the inscription could play the role of money (plastic bank cards), since all the information about the beast-worshipper will be kept on it. For the beast, the false prophet and their special services this will be a good opportunity to establish complete control over the people accepting the inscription.

"But purchases can be carried out also from home by means of orders or on the internet. In these cases the name of the beast (for example, on cheques that will be invalid without this name) or the number of his name may be used for purchases over the internet or telephone."[321]

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[320] St. Nilus, in Archimandrite Pantaleimon, op. cit., pp. 80-81.
[321] Molenko, http://www.omolenko.com/texts/tolk13_6.htm (in Russian).

These speculations concerning the meaning of the number are interesting and perhaps not wide of the mark, but they are only that: *speculations.* It must be emphasized, as St. Gregory Palamas reminds us,[322] that no number *of itself* is evil, for the whole creation, and therefore all numbers, were created good by God. A number only becomes evil when its reception is bound up with apostasy from Christ. In other words, it is not the number 666 *as such* which destroys the soul, but the apostasy from Christ which is the condition of receiving the seal of that number and the material benefits that go with it. To think otherwise – that is, to suppose that the number 666 is *in itself* evil - is to succumb to superstition. So even if we accept that the number 666 is bound up with certain computer or laser technology, we still need to know what the number *means* in order to understand *why* it destroys the soul and therefore why it must be avoided at all cost. For what is evil is not the number itself, but the end to which it is used.

How will it be used? We know from the Holy Fathers that the seal will be used as a sign that the person sealed willingly and consciously accepts and believes in the Antichrist. Thus St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher prophesied: "On the seal will be written the following: 'I am yours.' 'Yes, you are mine.' 'I go willingly, not by force.' 'And I accept you in accordance with your will, and not by force.' These are four utterances, or inscriptions, which will be written in the middle of this accursed seal..."

Now has anyone discovered that these four inscriptions are to be found on any modern technological device? As far as the present writer knows, the answer to that question is: no. In any case, such inscriptions make no sense before the appearance of the Antichrist himself. For what does "I am yours" mean if we do not know who "you" is? It follows that before the actual appearance of the Antichrist, and the people's willing and conscious acceptance of him as the true King of the Jews and God, the prophecy cannot be fulfilled.

At the same time, the appearance of the technology is undoubtedly *a sign of the times* (Matthew 16.3), a sign that we are approaching the end, and that we must prepare ourselves spiritually for the coming of the Antichrist.

[322] St. Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151, 224; *E.P.E.* 9, 492. Quoted in Kalyva, op. cit., p. 86.

4. The Seven Plagues

14.1-5. And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on Mount Sion, and with Him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps; and they sang as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and the elders: and no man could learn that song by the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

As in chapter seven, the seer's gaze is turned from the calamitous miseries on earth to the blessed mysteries of heaven. This alternation, which is a marked feature of the structure of the Apocalypse, corresponds to the spiritual situation of Christians during the last times. For then they will turn their gaze to God, and to the saints of God, as to their only support. **I have lifted up mine eyes to the mountains** [the saints of God]**, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, Who hath made heaven and the earth** (Psalm 120.1-2).

The 144,000 is a symbolical number representing, as in chapter seven, the children of the twelve tribes of Israel, who confess Christ during the reign of the Antichrist. They, like Nathaniel, are **Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile** (John 1.47). They are called **the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb** because the Jews, in the persons of the apostles and the first generation of Christians in Jerusalem, were the first nation to enter the new Israel, the Church of Christ, being the redeemed remnant of the old.

"Certain interpreters understand by the virgins not virgins in the literal sense of the word, but those who were saved from the mire of paganism and idol-worship, insofar as the Sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament not infrequently call idol-worship adultery." (Archbishop Averky)

14.6-7. And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and given glory to Him; for the hour of His judgement is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the foundations of waters.

From the redeemed Jews, attention is returned to **every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people**. For **the everlasting Gospel** must be preached to *all* nations before the end. As David said: **All the ends of the earth shall remember and shall turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of**

the nations shall worship Him (Psalm 21.27). And again: **All the nations whom Thou has made shall come and shall worship before Thee, O Lord** (Psalm 85.8). And as the Lord Himself said, **this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come** (Matthew 24.14).

And the first commandment of the Gospel is: **Fear God**, Who created all things, both **heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.** For this is the doctrine that the false prophet of pseudo-science has banished from the consciousness of men, making the other Christian doctrines incomprehensible and without foundation. In particular, Noah's flood, which was produced by the opening of the heavens above and **the fountains of water** below, is rejected as a myth in favour of the far more mythical idea of evolution. This enables the followers of pseudo-science to bask in a false sense of security, thinking that as there was no universal catastrophe such as the flood at the beginning of history, so there will be no such catastrophe at the end. For **there will come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His Coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they are willingly ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men...** [For] **the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up** (II Peter 3.3-7, 10).

"The Angel says, as it were: 'Fear God, do not be terrified of the Antichrist, who is not able to destroy the soul with the body, and with boldness - for the judgement and the recompense is near - resist him, for he has received power only for a short time." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

14.8. And there followed another angel saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad (Jeremiah 51.7).

"A second angel announced the fall of Babylon, by which is usually understood the kingdom of evil and sin in the world. Some interpreters have understood by this Babylon ancient pagan Rome, which made all nations drink **of the wine of fornication**, or idol-worship. Others see in this a symbol of a falsely Christian empire, and in **the wine of fornication** - false religious teaching." (Archbishop Averky)

In his interpretation of the Apocalypse, Professor Nicholas Orlov writes that the whore of Babylon will be "a city of an antichristian kingdom", and will "spread atheist and immoral culture amidst the peoples surrounding and subject to it", and that "by **the wine of fornication** should be understood the spreading of immoral practices and enmity towards God through hypocritical politics and depraved religion and culture - general debauchery."

The present interpretation, which is developed in more detail in the next section, sees in Babylon the false Christian civilization of the West, and New York as the centre of that civilization, and in **the wine of fornication** - the false religious teaching of ecumenism.

14.9-12. And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the Faith of Jesus.

Intoxication with ecumenism, which destroys all discrimation between objective truth and falsehood in religion, prepares the way directly for the acceptance of the most evil of all religions, the religion of the Antichrist.

"The third angel threatened with eternal torments all those who serve the beast and bow down before him and his image, and receive his mark on their forehead or hand. By **the wine of the wrath of God** one must understand the terrible judgements of God, which disturb the spirit as when one is drunk. In Palestine wine was never drunk undiluted, unmixed with water. Thus the wrath of God, because of its strong action, is here compared to unmixed wine. The impious will be subjected to eternal torments, but the saints will be saved by their patience." (Archbishop Averky)

14.13. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

"The heavenly voice does not bless all, but only those who, mortifying themselves to the world, die in the Lord, bearing in their bodies the mortification of Jesus and suffering together with Christ. For them their departure from the body is, in truth, a resting from their labours." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

"Here we find yet another witness to *the significance of good works for salvation*, which is denied by the Protestants." (Archbishop Averky)

14.14-16. And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud One sat like unto the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him that sat upon the cloud, Thrust in Thy sickle, and reap; for the time is come for Thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

"The One sitting on the cloud and like unto the Son of Man is Christ." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe, says the Prophet Joel (Joel 3.13). The harvest may represent the end of the world, as in the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13.39). But it may also represent the final in-gathering of souls into the granary of the Church just before the end of the world, as in the words of the Lord: **The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest** (Matthew 9.37-38; cf. John 4.35-38).

"That the harvest is ripe indicates that the final time has come when the seed of piety, which has matured like ripe wheat and has offered to the husbandman fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold will be vouchsafed the heavenly granaries." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

14.17-18. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud voice to Him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in Thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.

"From this we learn that some of the angelic powers which are place over creatures are in charge of waters, others of fire, and others of some other part of creation, and that this one was placed over fire indicates that he is one of the highest angels and his duty is to punish, for with a loud voice he beseeches the One having a sickle to cut off the clusters of the vine of the earth." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

Come, get you down; for the press is full, the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great, says the Prophet Joel (Joel 3.13; cf. Isaiah 63.1-6).

"By **clusters of grapes** is to be understood the enemies of the Church whose iniquity has reached an extreme (**are fully ripe**), so that the measure of their crimes overflows." (Archbishop Averky) For the Lord does not immediately punish the impious, but waits until their wickedness is beyond measure. In the same way He did not punish the Amorites in the time of Abraham, **for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full** (Genesis 15.16), but

waited until the time of Moses before executing His wrath upon them (Numbers 21.21-30).

14.19-20. And the angel thrust in the sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and the blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand six hundred furlongs.

"Here there is a reference to the city of Jerusalem, outside of which on the Mount of Olives there are many winepresses in which are pressed olives and grapes (cf. Joel 3.13). The abundance of the harvest of grapes is described in this way, that the wine is poured out on the earth in such abundance that it reached the horse bridles. The hyperbolic expression used here by the holy seer of mysteries indicates that the defeat of the enemies of God will be so terrible that the blood flow as if in rivers." (Archbishop Averky)

St. Cosmas of Aitolia prophesied: "In the city [Constantinople] so much blood will flow that a three-year-old calf will float on it."[323] St. John of Kronstadt likewise saw the Soviet Antichrist - and Sovietism still rules under a democratic mask in Russia today - being destroyed in the midst of unprecedented bloodshed, and specifically recalled this verse from the Apocalypse.[324] Again, Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava said: "This terrible war, say the saints, will begin in the East and will end in the West... More than half of mankind will perish... All the great cities will be annihilated... Indescribable sufferings await the inhabitants of the earth..."[325]

Taking all these prophecies together, then, with the closely related prophecies of Ezekiel 38-39 and Joel 2-3, we may conclude that the passage is referring to the destruction of the Russian armies, **Gog and Magog**, during their invasion of the Middle East and Israel, and in general to the unprecedented carnage of the Third World War.

"Inasmuch as those who gave themselves over to pleasures became ferocious horses, they will be taken by tortures up to the bridles - that is, they will be restrained by torments, for they allow no bridling in their pleasures. 1000 signifies the multitude of evil, and 600 - the fervent pursuit of sin through the misuse of creation which was made in six days, and also that in the 600th year of Noah the earth was inundated." (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

15.1. And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

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[323] Metropolitan Augustine, op. cit.
[324] St. John of Kronstadt, in Fomin, op. cit., p. 141 and Moss, op. cit.
[325] Schema-Monk Epiphanius (Chernov) *Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava*, Lavardac: Monastere St. Michael, 1988, p. 155 (in French).

The judgement summarized in the images of the winepress and harvest of chapter 14 is now described in more detail. The seven angels with the seven plagues correspond to the seven trumpets of chapters 8 and 9. The closest parallel is between the sixth plague and the sixth trumpet, which clearly describe the same event.

15.2. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

"The **sea of glass** signifies the multitude of those who are saved, the purity of the future rest and the radiance of the saints, by the rays of whose virtues they **shine forth as the sun** (Matthew 13.43). As for the fire mixed with it, this can be understood from the Scripture of the apostle: **every man's work, of what sort it is, shall be revealed by fire** (I Corinthians 3.13). It will not harm the pure and undefiled in any way, for, according to the psalmist's word (Psalm 28.7), it has two properties: one **-** that of burning sinners, and the other, as St. Basil understood, that of enlightening the righteous. One should probably also understand by the fire Divine vision and the grace of the life-creating Spirit**,** for God was revealed to Moses in fire, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles in the form of fiery tongues." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

"The harps signify the harmony of virtues in the well-ordered spiritual life of the righteous or the harmony which is to be observed in them between the word of truth and the deed of righteousness." (Archbishop Averky)

St. Cyprian of Carthage quotes a slightly different text here: **And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and the beasts were feeding with His lambs; and the number of His name a hundred and forty and four standing upon the sea of glass, having the harps of God.**[326]

15.3-4. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the son of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy; for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgements are manifest.

"The fact that the righteous sing **the song of Moses** and **the song of the Lamb** evidently indicates that they are 'those justified before grace under the law' and 'those who lived righteously after the Coming of Christ'. The song of Moses is sung as a song of *victory*: 'It is fitting for those who triumph in the last, most important victory over the enemy to recall the first successes of their struggle, such as was the victory of Moses over Pharaoh in the history of the chosen people of God. His song is also sung now by the Christian

[326] St. Cyprian, *Three Books of Testimonies against the Jews*, III, 20.

conquerors' (St. Andrew of Caesarea). This song sounds exceptionally triumphant: **Let us sing to the Lord, for He has been greatly glorified** - and in the circumstances it is completely appropriate." (Archbishop Averky)

The last part of this song, **all nations shall come and worship before Thee**, is not to be found in Moses, but in David (Psalm 21.27), in the same psalm which begins with the words: **My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?** This indicates the close relationship between the Cross and the Resurrection, the moment of near-despair and the moment of victory. Time and again, the Lord chooses the moment when human resources are at an end to show that He alone is the Head and Saviour of the Church, and not only saves the Church from being overcome by the gates of hell but even brings a vast harvest of souls into her granary.

This will pre-eminently be the case after the Third World War, when, according to Elder Aristocles, "believers will come out of Russia and turn away many from the nations to God", and when, according to the anonymous prophet of Mount Athos, "the Orthodox faith shall be uplifted and shall spring from East to West".[327]

Yea, at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve Him with one accord (Zephaniah 3.9).

15.5-6. And after that I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: and the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.

"After this **the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened**, according to the image of which God had commanded Moses in the Old Testament to construct the earthly tabernacle, and **the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues.** The seer says that they were clothed in pure and shining linen garments, and their breasts were girded with golden girdles, as a sign of their power, the purity of their nature, and the absolute integrity of their service." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

15.7. And one of the four living creatures gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, Who liveth for ever and ever.

"From one of the four **living creatures**, that is, senior angels, they received **seven golden vials,** or seven golden cups, **full of the wrath** (anger) **of God, Who liveth for ever and ever.** These **living creatures** were *Cherubim* or *Seraphim* - supreme zealots of the glory of God, filled with the deepest vision of the judgements of God, both past and future, which is shown by the very

[327] See V. Moss, "The Philadelphian Church", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 46, no. 2, March-April, 1996; Fr. Nilus Sotiropoulos, op. cit.

appearance of these blessed beings, filled with eyes in front and behind. They receive the command of God to authorize the other seven angels to pour out upon the earth the seven cups of the wrath of God before the end of the world and the last judgement on the living and the dead." (Archbishop Averky)

15.8. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from His power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the angels were fulfilled.

Around Him stood the Seraphim; each had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory. And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke (Isaiah 6.2-4).

"Through this smoke we recognize how terrible, frightening and tormenting is the wrath of God, which, filling the temple, on the day of judgement will visit those worthy of it and first of all those who have submitted to the Antichrist and have accomplished the works of apostasy." (Archbishop Averky)

16.1-4. And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, God your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them that worshipped his image. And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea. And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood.

Sores on the body and pollution of the seas and rivers: it is easy to see how this might take place in the conditions of thermo-nuclear or bio-chemical war. Or they may be the result of epidemics like AIDS. For it is precisely of homosexuals that the apostle says that **they receive in themselves the fitting reward for their error** (Romans 1.27).

16.5-7. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because Thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgements.

"Thus he says that from this altar was heard a voice praising the righteousness of God's judgement, which surpasses every mind in word. From the Gospels we know that the noetic powers are glad and rejoice over the salvation of those who are converted through repentance, while they grieve over the seduction from the true path and give thanks to God for the

punishment of those who have transgressed the Divine commandments, so that at least in part they may receive the forgiveness of sins." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

16.8-16. And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues; and they repented not to give Him glory. And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and repented not of their deeds. And the sixth angel poured his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

The events described here, which are so reminiscent of the ten plagues of Egypt in the time of Moses (Exodus 10), may correspond to the following awesome prophecy of Hieromartyr Constantine the Russian: "There will be destruction on land and sea. On March 18th there will be an increase in bloody wars and victories. On July 8th two unheard-of wars will coincide. On August 12th there will be an unbearable heatwave. On December 18th half mankind will perish..."[328]

The further interpretation of these verses depends on our identification of: **the seat of the beast, the great river Euphrates** and **Armageddon.** In 2.13, **Satan's seat** is clearly a geographical place - according to the literal interpretation, Pergamum, where a temple dedicated to the worship of the Emperor had been erected. **The seat of the beast** is therefore also probably a geographical place - perhaps Lenin's mausoleum, which was built on the model of the temple in Pergamum.

The great river Euphrates is of great strategic importance today as in ancient times, when it marked the eastern frontier of the Roman empire in the period of its greatest extent. It was across the Euphrates that many great kings of the east launched themselves against the empire, notably in the reign of one of the clearest forerunners of the Antichrist, Julian the Apostate, and again in the seventh century, when the Persians crossed it on their way to capturing Jerusalem, and again in the thirteenth century, when the Mongols destroyed Babylon and laid waste the irrigation system on which the

[328] St. Constantius, in Bishop Gregory of Messenia, op. cit..

civilizations of Mesopotamia had depended. Today the American armies have fought their way across it twice in the last fifteen years…

The Euphrates runs through several different countries, making it a very important water resource in a world that is gradually running out of water.[329] The prophecy of its waters drying up if the country that controls its source, Turkey, were to cut it off. This would leave the countries downstream from Turkey, Syria and Iraq, deprived of water and so at Turkey's mercy. But this might **prepare the way** for **the kings of the east** – that is, the Chinese, who are allies of Syria…

Consistent with this interpretation is Grant Jeffrey's belief that in the words, **that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared**, the seer is here talking about the great military highway that the Chinese have built through the south of China, Tibet, Afghanistan and Pakistan. [330] This military highway may indeed be the way of the Chinese into the Middle East. And the last stage in its way may be the crossing of a dried-up Euphrates in order to attack Turkey…

However, there could be a less literal interpreration. As we have seen, in the Apocalypse geographical names are sometimes given symbolical names referring to other places, as Jerusalem is called Sodom or Egypt (11.8). If we apply the same principle here, then we may suppose that the Euphrates is the spiritual name of another river that has the same strategic significance today as the Euphrates had in the past. What river, then, marks the eastern boundary of the greatest empire of modern times, across which eastern armies may pass in order to invade an antichristian kingdom? A glance at the map shows that a good candidate is the river Amur in Siberia, which marks the eastern frontier of Russia with China.

Our supposition gains greater credibility from the increasing power of China in the military and economic spheres, from the fact that China has always made claims on those parts of Siberia bordering on the Amur, and, above all, from the prophecies concerning an invasion of Russia from China made by St. John of Kronstadt and Elder Aristocles of Moscow (see commentary on 10.1-2). Moreover, the river Amur is frozen for much of the year, which may explain the meaning of the phrase: **the water thereof was dried up** - dried up, not from the heat of the sun, we may suppose, but from the petrifying effect of the Siberian cold. If **the empire of the beast** is Russia, and **the kings of the east** are the Chinese, and **the great river Euphrates** is the Amur, then the invasion of the empire of the beast by the kings of the east over the dried up river Euphrates may refer to an invasion of Russia by the Chinese across the frozen waters of the river Amur.

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[329] See Bryan Lufkin, "Why 'Hydro-Politics' will Shape the 21st Century", http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170615-why-hydro-politics-will-shape-the-21st-century.

[330] Jeffrey, *The Signature of God*, Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996, pp. 198-199)…

With regard to **Armageddon**, however, we are not as free to resort to a symbolical interpretation. For Armageddon is specifically called such **in the Hebrew tongue**, which implies a specific link with the land of Israel and the Jewish people. It may be significant that the other name in the Apocalypse which is given **in the Hebrew tongue** is **Abaddon**, the demon-king of the army of locust invaders (9.11), whom we have identified with **Gog and Magog**, the Russian invaders of Israel. Some interpreters identify Armageddon with Megiddo on the plain of Jezreel in Northern Israel, the scene of King Josiah's death in battle with the Egyptian Pharaoh (IV Kings 24.29; II Chronicles 35.22). If this is accepted, then it is here that the Russian armies, gathered, according to the Old Testament prophecies, between two seas (the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Tiberias or the Dead Sea), will meet their doom.

According to the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah, which a Jewish tradition says will be fulfilled "under Gog"[331], the invaders will perish in a manner reminiscent of the effects of a nuclear explosion: **their flesh shall consume away while they are standing upon their feet, and their eyes shall melt out of their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth** (14.12).

The **three unclean spirits** have been interpreted to mean the three false prophets of the communist revolution, Marx, Engels and Lenin.[332]

16.17-19. And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.

"With the pouring out of the seventh vial the kingdom of the beast will be finally crushed." (Archbishop Averky)

From the Far Eastern and Middle Eastern theatres of war, the vision of the seer now encompasses the world as a whole; both **the great city** (Jerusalem?) and **the cities of the nations** and **Babylon**. We may suppose that Moscow and New York, Peking and Paris, Petersburg and London will all perish or be very severely affected in the **great earthquake**, the nuclear cataclysm. (Cf. 11.19: **And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake**.) Thus Elder Aristocles prophesied: "America… will collapse. France will be just nothing. Britain will lose all her colonies, and come to

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[331] St. Jerome, *Commentary on Zechariah, P.L.* 25, 914 (in Latin).

[332] K.V. "On the Apocalyptic Beast", *Church Word*, N 1, January-February, 1998, p. 9 (in Russian).

almost complete ruin, but will be saved by praying enthroned women. Russia and China will destroy each other..." [333]

The division of **the great city into three parts** may indicate three different kinds of destiny for its inhabitants. Thus St. Cosmas of Aitolia prophesied that a third of the Muslims will die in the world war, a third will go into captivity, and a third will become Christians.[334] Or the reference may be to a Jewish city such as Jerusalem or New York. For as we read in Zechariah concerning the Jews and Israel: **It shall come to pass that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts thereof shall be cut off and perish; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and I will try them as silver is tried, and I will prove them as gold is proved; they shall call upon My name, and I will hear them, and say, This is My people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God** (12.8-9).

Alternatively, the three parts into which **the great city** is divided could refer to the three administrative centres of the future world government - the European, the American and the Pacific - which are already being discussed by the builders of the New World Order. Already a trade war between Europe and America is beginning. Moreover, three organs of the visible leaders of the New World Order are planned - the Bilderberg society, the Trilateral Commission and the Council of International Relations.[335] Perhaps these will fall out with each other.

16.20. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

This may mean a radical change in the geography of the world following on the nuclear cataclysm. Or, alternatively, it may indicate the fleeing of Christian communities (**islands**) and their leaders (**mountains**) into specially prepared places of refuge. For "from the Divine Scriptures," says St. Andrew of Caesarea, "we are instructed to understand by **islands** the holy churches, and by **mountains** - those who have the rule in them."

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[333] Just before his execution by a Soviet firing squad, a priest of the Russian Catacomb Church named Alexander turned to his fellow-prisoners and said: "Please wake up and listen to what I am going to tell you. You know that I was sleeping just now. In my sleep I saw my father, a priest who was killed by the Bolsheviks. He appeared to me with a beautiful shining cross on his breast and said to me the very important words: 'Today you will be with me!'" Then the prison commandant came to take Fr. Alexander away to his martyric death. And as he was leaving the cell, he turned and said: "Yes, and my father said something more: '*Moscow will be swallowed up!*'" (Schema-Monk Epiphanius (Chernov), *The Catacomb Church in the Russian Land*, op. cit.)

It is known to geologists that Moscow is situated above an underground lake. If an earthquake were to take place, either through natural causes or through a nuclear bomb, Moscow might well be swallowed up in the waters...

[334] St. Cosmas, in Metropolitan Augustine, op. cit.

[335] See Budzilovich, "The New World Order in the year 2000?", op. cit., p. 7.

"For the islands are made new for God, as saith Isaiah, by which we should understand the churches now built by the nations, which receive a firm foundation from God."[336]

16.21. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail: for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

And there was… great hail (11.19). The **plague of hail** may be some terrible physical after-effect of the cataclysm - further bombs, according to Archbishop Averky, nuclear fall-out, according to another interpretation. "By the **hail** coming down from heaven we understand God's wrath sent by Him and coming down from above. And that this hail is the size of a talent indicates the fullness of wrath by reason of the full weight and extremity of sin. An indication of this is the talent which Zechariah saw (Zechariah 5.7)." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

[336] *Menaion*, September 13, Vespers, "Lord, I have cried", verse.

5. The Whore of Babylon

The seer now breaks off his narrative to focus attention on a figure that has already appeared, but whose inner nature has not yet been described.

17.1-6. And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgement of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: and upon her head was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her I wondered with great admiration.

Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow writes: "**Babylon.** The origin of this is not as clear in the Hebrew language – **Babel** from **balal**, as it is in the Chaldean – **Babel** from **bilbel**. However, in both the one and the other its single root is evident, and the meaning of 'mixing'. The name **Babylon** is mystical and typical (17.5). In the Revelation of John the Theologian Babylon is set against Jerusalem: just as the latter signifies **the Bride of the Lamb**, so, on the contrary, the former signifies **the Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth** (21.9,10; 17.5). From this it is evident that **Babylon** refers to *the church of the Antichrist*, just as **Jerusalem** refers to *the Church of Christ*. When Babylon is called **great** and **mother**, the reference is to the church of the Antichrist throughout space and time. This spiritual Babylon, finally, is revealed sensibly in a certain visible society or city whose vivid features are described by John (chs. 17, 18). The desire to **make a name** for themselves (Genesis 11.4) that is more than human, so as to place it instead of the name of God; the striving for universal dominion through a general consorting with passions, vices, superstition and lack of faith – are signs of the builders and the building, which will end with an extreme mixing and punishments from God."[337]

"**Babylon**... is usually understood to be the kingdom of evil and sin in the world. Some interpreters have understood this **Babylon** to be ancient pagan Rome, which has filled all the peoples with **the wine of her fornication**, or idol-worship. Others see in this symbol an antichristian Empire, and in **the wine of her fornication** - false religious teaching..." (Archbishop Averky)

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[337] Metropolitan Philaret, *Notes leading to a basic understanding of the Book of Genesis*, Moscow, 1867, part 2, p. 43 (in Russian).

The problem with interpreting Babylon as a state is that it then becomes difficult to distinguish clearly between the whore and the beast on whom she sits. Preferable, therefore, is Averky's alternative definition, which is the same as Metropolitan Philaret's, of the whore as "*a church that is unfaithful to Christ*, which has worshipped the Antichrist, or a society that has apostasized from God."

This is the definition adopted by an anonymous author of the Catacomb Church: "The great Whore is undoubtedly a people believing in God that has betrayed the Christian Orthodox Church and has joined the new church of the Antichrist."[338]

It is also the interpretation of New Martyr Jacob Arkatov (+1991): "Concerning the **whore** is it not clear to you that this image describes a traitor-church that is unfaithful to Christ, which ought to be 'the bride of Christ' but has united with the scarlet beast? In the Apocalypse there are three 'women', and all of them signify the Church, only from their clothing and activity is it possible to distinguish them: on her way to the desert she is clothed in the sun, but then she is divided into one that is adorned in scarlet and the one that goes out to meet Christ, adorned in pure and radiant clothing, which is the righteousness of the saints."[339]

False religion, or the nation which has fallen away from the true faith, is often portrayed in Holy Scripture under the image of a harlot (cf. Isaiah 1.21; Jeremiah 2.20; Ezekiel 16.28, ch. 25; Hosea ch. 2; Zechariah 5.5-11). True religion and the faithful people of God, by contrast, are compared to a chaste virgin betrothed to Christ (cf. The Song of Songs 6.9; II Corinthians 11.2).

Thus just as the woman clothed with the sun represents the true Church of all times and especially of the last times, so the Babylonian whore represents the false church of all times and especially of the last times, in accordance with the word: **Wickedness came from Babylon, from the elders of the judges, who seemed to rule the people** (Daniel (History of Susanna) 13.5). And just as the true Church is persecuted by the red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, i.e. the devil, so the false church, and false religion generally, is borne by, i.e. is supported by, that same devil. For **all the gods of the pagans are demons**, as David says (Psalm 95.5); and **no lie is of the truth**, as St. John says (I John 2.21), but is of **the father of lies**, the devil (John 8.44).

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[338] Anonymous, *In the Embraces of the Seven-Headed Serpent,* Montreal, 1984 (in Russian). Another witness from the Catacombs, Hieroconfessor Bishop Barnabas of Pechersk, writes: "Objectively speaking, from the point of view of its external existence, as a perceived fact, *the world* is the apocalyptic Babylonian **whore that sitteth upon many waters**, that is, upon peoples and nations." (*Orthodoxy*, Kolomna: New Golutvin monastery, 1995, p. 134 (in Russian). Italics supplied by the present writer).

[339] Fr. (now Bishop) Victor Pivovarov, "The Life of the Catacomb Ascetic Jacob Fyodorovich Arkatov", http://www.omolenko.com/texts/arkatov.htm (in Russian).

An anonymous author of the Catacomb Church writes: "In a new vision John gives explanations of the preceding visions. An angel appears before John, one of the seven in whose hands were the vials of the wrath of God. In the expression **Come hither** one can see an indication of a change in direction in John's thoughts and attentiveness. Now he had to direct his prophetic vision on the judgement on the great Whore sitting on many waters. By the **Whore** we must understand the same people in Babylon as was mentioned in 14.8; there it is called a great city and is characterized as a whore. Judgement must be carried out on it in accordance with the words in 16.19. The great Whore is undoubtedly a people believing in God that has betrayed the Christian Orthodox Church and has joined the new church of the Antichrist...

"The **wilderness** here should be taken in a moral-religious sense, the sense of abandonment, rejection. The great Whore is in the wilderness in no other sense than that she has been completely abandoned by God and doomed to spiritual destruction because of her evil-doing. She has completely merited this abandonment because, in the expression of the Apocalypse, she had renounced God and the Christian religion, and has taken her seat on the beast; the adulterous woman places all her hopes on him and on his strength, and not on God and His help."[340]

The language used to describe this New Testament Babylon is reminiscent of the denunciations of the Old Testament Babylon in Isaiah (13 and 14) and Jeremiah (50 and 51). Since the Tower of Babel, Babylon has represented the source and fountain-head of all pagan religions and abominations. Thus the birth of the Hebrew race was marked by God's call to Abraham to come out of the Babylonian city of Ur. In the prophets' time Babylon again became a great kingdom, and Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple and exiled the Jews to Babylonia. From there Zerubbabel, whose name means "alien to Babylon, or confusion", led them back to Jerusalem.

The first king of Babylon was Nimrod, of whom Josephus writes: "It was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah, a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it were through his means that they were happy, but to believe that it was their own courage that procured their happiness. He also gradually changed the government into tyranny, seeing no other method of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence on his own power."[341]

Two Catacomb Church nuns explain this: "If, before the flood, the impious apostates were the Cainites, the descendants of the brother-murderer, then after the flood they became the sons of the lawless Ham. The Hamites founded Babylon, one of the five cities of the powerful hunter Nimrod (Genesis 10.8). 'Nimrod, imitating his forefather, chose another form of

[340] Anonymous, *In the Embraces of the Seven-Headed Serpent*, Montreal.
[341] Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, book 1, chapter 4, paragraph 2.

slavery...' (St. John Chrysostom, *Word 29 on Genesis*). Nimrod invented a form of slavery in which 'those who boast of freedom in fact cringe' (ibid.). He rebelled against God, against the Divine patriarchal order of governing families and governing peoples. The times of Nimrod were characterized by the appearance of the beginnings of godless monarchism and future imperialism. Having rejected God, this eastern usurper created a kingdom based on his own power.[342]

"Later, the lands of Assur and Babylon were called the Assyro-Babylonian kingdom (Micah 5.1). Among the cities of Nimrod was Erech (in the local dialect - Irka, later Iraq… The city of Kalach was called Nimrud by the Arabs in honour of King Nimrod… Later the kingdom expanded from the small four-citied area far beyond Mesopotamia to the slopes of the Armenian mountains. Nimrod's very idea of founding a universal monarchy was a protest against Noah's curse of Canaan. A sign of protest and at the same time of power was the huge tower that the Hamites attempted to raise. God punished them, confusing the language of the proud builders, so that they no longer understood each other. During an excavation in Iran there was found a huge foundation remaining from the majestic tower of Nimrod… Herodotus writes in his *History* that they built small ziggurats in Babylon (evidently in memory of the first failure) consisting of towers placed on top of each other. On the top of the small ziggurat E-temen-anki was raised a statue of the idol Marduk weighing 23.5 tons. Many centuries later the notable tyrant Nebuchadnezzar said: 'I laid my hand to finishing the construction of the tope of E-temen-anki, so that it might quarrel with heaven'.[343]

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[342] Recently, David Rohl has argued persuasively that Nimrod is to be identified with the Sumerian Enmerkar, whose name means "Enmeru the hunter". "Look at what we have here. Nimrod was closely associated with Erech – the biblical name for Uruk – where Enmerkar ruled. Enmerkar built a great sacred precinct at Uruk and constructed a temple at Eridu – that much we know from the epic poem 'Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta'. The Sumerian King List adds that Enmerkar was 'the one who built Uruk'. Nimrod was also a great builder, constructing the cities of Uruk, Akkad and Babel. Both Nimrod and Enmerkar were renowned for their huntsmanship. Nimrod, as the grandson of Ham, belongs to the second 'generation' after the flood (Noah-Ham-Flood-Cush-Nimrod) and this is also true of Enmerkar who is recorded in the Sumerian King List as the second ruler of Uruk after the flood (Ubartutu-(Utnapishtim)-Flood-Meskiagkasher-Enmerkar). Both ruled over their empires in the land of Shinar/Sumer." (*Legend: The Genesis of Civilization*, London: Random House, 1998, p. 216).

[343] Grant Jeffrey writes: "[In the nineteenth century] the French government sent Professor Oppert to report on the cuneiform inscriptions discovered in the ruins of Babylon. Oppert translated a long inscription by King Nebuchadnezzar in which the king referred to the tower in the Chaldean language as *Borzippa*, which means *Tongue-tower.* The Greeks used the word *Borsippa*, with the same meaning of *tongue-tower*, to describe the ruins of the Tower of Babel. This inscription of Nebuchadnezar clearly identified the original tower of Borsippa with the Tower of Babel described by Moses in Genesis. King Nebuchadnezzar decided to rebuild the base of the ancient Tower of Babel, built over sixteen centuries earlier by Nimrod, the first King of Babylon. He also called it the Temple of the Spheres. During the millenium since God destroyed it, the tower was reduced from its original height and magnificence until only the huge base of the tower (four hundred and sixty feet by six hundred and ninety feet) standing some two hundred and seventy-five feet high remained within the outskirts of the city of Babylon. Today the ruins have been reduced to about one hundred and fifty feet above the

"From the beginning Babylon was a weapon of Satan, created and built with the aim of hindering the accomplishment on earth of the work of God. 'The first union was the union of Shinar, formed with an aim which even our enlightened aim would not have been ashamed of. Its aim was to further the interests of men on earth and glorify man' (*Interpretation of Genesis*, St. Petersburg, 1909, p. 87). The building of the tower of Babel was not the end of Chaldean history. In the 20th century before Christ the will of God raised righteous Abraham to leave corrupted Ur, a city with a ziggurat constructed by Ur-Nammu for the edification of his proud descendants. In the promised land the Lord granted victory to St. Abraham and the 318 members of his family over a union of eastern kings led by a Babylonian (Genesis 14.5).

"The symbolical beginning of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom is attributed by the chroniclers to Nabonassar (747 B.C.). But the true founder of the dynasty was Nabopalassar… In November, 626 (all dates before the Birth of Christ), he led the 'liberation' movement in Assyria. A year later Nabopalassar and the Mede Kiaksar became allies. In 613 the cunning Chaldean succeeded in annihilating the opposition and became the single ruler, while a year after that, with the support of Media, he became king of the state. The fall of Nineveh became the day of the foundation of the New Babylon. The most important points in the rule of Nabopalassar were: 611 - a sudden advance to the south, successes in the civil war, 610 - triumphant progress through Assyria, 607 - illness, 605 - death. His successor Nebuchadnezzar… was chosen by God for the punishment of the Jews for their idol-worship. Jerusalem fell. The Jewish King Jeconiah was led in shackles to Babylon. Instead of him the tyrant raised Zedekiah to the throne, but he was later blinded and was also led away to Babylon in chains. During the reign of Nebuchadnezzar there were three captivities of the Jews - in 598/597, 585 and 582 (Jeremiah 52.28-30; cf. IV Kings 24.8-12; 25.1-2,4).

"The archaeologists have confirmed that there were many captives with Hebrew names in Babylon… Having conquered Egypt, the Babylonian monarch became a great ruler who was honoured and exalted in every way.

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plain with a circumference of 2,300 feet. Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt the city of Babylon in great magnificence with gold and silver, and then decided to rebuild the lowest platform of the Tower of Babel in honor of the Chaldean gods. King Nebuchadnezzar resurfaced the base of the Tower of Babel with gold, silver, cedar, and fir, at great cost on top of a hard surface of baked clay bricks. These bricks were engraved with the seal of Nebuchadnezzar… In this inscription found on the base of the ruins of the Tower of Babel, King Nebuchadnezzar speaks in his own words from thousands of years ago confirming one of the most interesting events of the ancient past..: 'The tower, the eternal house, which I founded and built. I have completed its magnificence with silver, gold, other metals, stone, enamelled bricks, fir and pine. The first which is the house of the earth's base, the most ancient monument of Babylon; I built it. I have highly exalted its head with bricks covered with copper. We say for the other, that is, this edifice, the house of the seven lights of the earth, the most ancient monument of Borsippa. A former king built it, (they reckon 42 ages) but he did not complete its head. Since a remote time, people had abandoned it, without order expressing their words…'" (op. cit., pp. 40-41)

He died at the age of 70 in 562, having left the throne to Evilmerodakh (Abelmarduk). Having retired from active government, in 560 Evilmerodakh was removed by Neriglissar (in the Bible Nergal-Sharetser). The latter had been Nebuchadnezzar's military chief of staff. His successor Labashi-Marduk was in no way able to govern. This cruel and corrupted ruler died as a result of a palace coup. His murderers placed Nabonidus on the throne in 555… The son of a magus, the head of the Babylonian priesthood, Nabonidus occupied himself in theoretical researches and left the government in order to be treated at Teimu. His son Baltasar lived in luxury and corruption in the capital city. In 539 Cyrus the Persian crossed the Tigris and arrived in Akkad from Elam. Nabonidus was seized, and King Baltasar was killed in the night that the city was taken. In 535 the Jewish captives were allowed to return to Palestine..."[344]

At the time of writing of the Apocalypse, the role of ancient Babylon had been taken by the pagan Rome Empire, in which all the mystery religions of the East found a haven and from which they radiated out again in all directions. Thus "several people have taken this whore for ancient Rome, since she is situated on seven hills. They have considered the seven heads of the beast that bears her to be seven of the most impious of the emperors from Domitian to Diocletian who persecuted the Church" (Archbishop Averky).

Some have identified Babylon with *pagan* Rome on the basis of St. Peter's words: **She that is the elect in Babylon greets you, as does also my son Mark** (I Peter 5.13). This was the opinion of the Church historian Eusebius, who wrote that this epistle was composed in Rome, and "Babylon" referred figuratively to Rome."[345] It is supported by Jonathan Hill, who writes that "after AD 70, many Jews referred to Rome as 'Babylon', because the Romans had destroyed Herod's Temple just as the Babylonians had destroyed Solomon's, six centuries earlier." [346] However, St. Andrew of Caesarea disagrees with this view. And Archbishop Averky considers that St. Peter was referring to Babylon in Egypt, present-day Cairo.

In any case, pagan Rome was never as unambiguously evil in the minds of the fathers as the great whore appears to be in the pages of the Apocalypse. Rome represented law, order and stability no less than persecuting zeal against Christians (which was in any case intermittent). For according to a very firm tradition, Rome, even in her pagan incarnation, was **that which restraineth** the coming of the Antichrist (II Thessalonians 2.6, 7).[347]

Now the most popular candidate for the role of the whore among almost all Protestant writers, and some Orthodox[348], has been *the Roman papacy*. For

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[344] "The Mystery of the Apocalyptic Babylon", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 47 (545), May, 1995, pp. 14-16 (in Russian).
[345] Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, 15.2.
[346] Hill, *Christianity: The First 400 Years,* Oxford: Lion Books, 2013, p. 73.
[347] Bousset, op. cit., chapter 9.
[348] For example, Fr. Oleg Molenko, http://www.omolenko/texts/tolk17_2.htm (in Russian).

the papacy conforms to the description of the whore of Babylon in many details. Thus like the whore, she is situated on seven hills or mountains (17.9); she is fabulously wealthy (17.4); the popes until the year 1513 had the word "mystery" inscribed on their tiaras (17.5)[349]; she has killed many martyrs of Christ (17.6); she is the mother of many other harlots, that is, heresies; and she supposes herself infallible and indestructible (18.7).

The papacy remains a strong candidate for the role of the whore; but in the twentieth century some powerful new contenders have emerged. Thus many contemporary interpreters, especially from Russia, have identified the whore with *the apostate Moscow Patriarchate*. For, like the whore, the Soviet church **sits on the beast**, that is, relies on antichristian political power to keep her in existence, and the scarlet colour shared by the beast and the whore witness to their cooperation in the world antichristian movement of Communism.

Archbishop Hilarion (Troitsky) favours this interpretation because the whore is evidently "not a self-appointed schismatic, but a faithful wife who has the image of genuine piety which has evidently not been defiled by any previous apostasy…

"Are there not taking place before our very eyes events that involuntarily bring to mind the spiritual visions of the New Testament seer of mysteries? Compare the above-cited words of the Apocalypse [from chapters 17 and 18] with the deeds and actions of our living churchmen and renovationists. Do they not apply to them to the smallest detail? Still more significant in the indicated apocalyptic image are the events of recent days connected with the name of Metropolitan Sergius [founder of the Soviet Moscow Patriarchate]."[350]

"This false so-called 'church', created by the enemy of Christ with the purpose of deceiving the whole world, bears a similarity to the true Church in name and externals. But we are fully entitled to consider that, as it is said in the Apocalypse, she spiritually **sits on the scarlet beast** (Revelation 17.3). For the red false-church is not only an obedient, but also a powerful instrument of falsehood in the hands of the Antichrist. With her help he wages a broad struggle both within and without. Within the country the false church struggles first of all against the true Church, which refused to be reconciled with the Antichrist and is systematically annihilated by him. Agents of the

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[349] John Eadie, "The Man of Sin", op. cit., p. 344. Other Protestant writers have pointed out that the raising of a circular wafer during the Mass is reminiscent of the way in which the priests of Baal raised circular images of the sun above their altars. Moreover, at the top of each of the four columns around the high altar in St. Peter's Rome is a sun-image, while on the wall there is a very large and elaborate sunburst image as there was in the great temple in Babylon. See Michael de Semlyen, *All Roads Lead to Rome?*, Gerrards Cross: Dorchester House Publications, 1993, pp. 39-40.

[350] Archbishop Hilarion. Bishop Gregory Grabbe, ("The Russian Church in the Wilderness and in this World", in *The Testament of the Holy Patriarch*, Moscow, 1996, p. 99 (in Russian)) believes that these words were written by Hieromartyr Theodore, Archbishop of Volokolamsk..

enemy of Christ in the red false-church ostentatiously wear panagias and crosses, sakkoses and phelonia, ancient cowls and golden mitres and all the rest, using their 'plumage' (exterior) and deceiving the people by all means to accept as 'lawful', 'God-given' and 'blessed from on high' the power of the Antichrist that is hateful to God, and to render it complete obedience in everything. These spiritual wolves call on their blinded flock directly from the ambon to seek out and hand over all the Orthodox Christians who are obedient to the voice of the true Church, which has not fallen on her knees before the new Baal - the enemy of God, as the red false-church has done."[351]

Moscow, like Rome, is said to be situated on seven hills; and Moscow, like Rome, is drenched, - by association with, and denunciation to, the Soviet persecutors, - **in the blood of the martyrs of Jesus**. And if the Moscow Patriarchate is not as fabulously wealthy as the Roman Papacy, she is rapidly becoming so through her association with the Russian mafia, as is witnessed by the no-expense-spared reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. Moreover, the present patriarch, Cyril (Gundiaev) has a personal fortune estimated at $4 billion. This rapid transformation of the once-pious Church of Russia into the active partner of the Antichrist would not unnaturally elicit the amazement of the God-seer: **when I saw her I wondered with great admiration.** It is as if he asked himself: "How can such an inner transformation of the Bride of Christ into the Whore of the Antichrist take place?"

A further argument in favour of this identification is the interpretation given to a prophecy from Daniel by the two Catacomb Church nuns: "In the fourth chapter of the book of the holy Prophet Daniel the key to the interpretation of the mystery of **the whore of Babylon** was given. The tree signifying Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom (i.e. Babylon) was cut down, but **the root was left in iron fetters**, over which **seven times** will pass. According to the Jewish understanding, a time is equivalent to 360 years, so seven times is 2520 years. Daniel interpreted the dream of the king in 603 B.C. We learn the year of the beginning of the apocalyptic Babylon from the expiry of the seven times - 1917!"[352]

However, both the Roman papacy and the Moscow Patriarchate have recently given up a significant part of their power to a third, still more fitting candidate for the role of the whore: *the ecumenical movement*, and the coming new ecumenical "church" of all (false) religions - which also began to come into being around 1917.

By the early 1980s the ecumenical movement had already united in itself all the Christian heresies, after which it embarked upon "super-ecumenism", the uniting of Christianity with all the non-Christian religions. It is therefore fittingly called **the Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth**. Fr.

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[351] Anonymous, op. cit., pp. 138, 140-41, 147.
[352] "The Mystery of the Apocalyptic Babylon", op. cit.

Justin Popovich claimed that the World Council of Churches contained no less than 263 heresies! Since his death (in 1979), many more must have been added…

There are signs that the Pope, following his "prayer for peace" with the leaders of all the world's religions in Assisi in 1986, may be called on to lead this false ecumenical church of all religions.[353]

The Old Calendarist Bulgarian theologian Ivan Marchevsky has argued persuasively that the whore of Babylon is *Freemasonry*.[354] But this is in no way inconsistent with the present argument. For, as is well known, the Freemasons have been both the main inspiration behind the ecumenical movement, and are the secret rulers of contemporary western civilization.

Moreover, insofar as the power of Freemasonry is coterminous with western civilization itself, we may also identify the whore of Babylon with *the civilization of the West* which nurtures and is thoroughly imbued with ecumenism, and to which all the nations of the world, with the partial exceptions of China, North Korea and the Islamic world, may be said to belong. Truly, all **the kings of the earth have committed fornication** with this whore, and all **the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication** - the doctrine of indifference to the truth and tolerance for all beliefs and all life-styles that do not interfere with the hedonistic goals of modern man.

Following this line of argument, the *city* that most closely symbolizes Babylon today is neither Rome nor Moscow but *New York*. For not only is New York the true capital of modern Jewish-Masonic civilization: as Denis Geoffroy points out: it "so resembles the description of Babylon in the Apocalypse of St. John that it is hard to believe that this is a simple coincidence."[355] Thus Werner Keller writes that "the town plan of Babylon is reminiscent of the blueprints for large American cities", especially New York.[356]

The destruction of New York's twin towers on September 11, 2001 both looked back to God's destruction of the towers of Babylon and forward to the coming destruction of the whole of contemporary western civilization.[357]

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[353] De Semlyen (op. cit.) points out, among many other interesting facts, that 25% of the staff of the World Council of Churches was Roman Catholic at the time of writing (1993), although the Roman Church has not yet officially entered that organisation.

[354] Marchevsky, op. cit.

[355] *The Transmitted Faith and Holy Tradition*, 69, March, 1993, p. 12 (in French).

[356] Werner, *The Bible as History*, New York: Bantam Books, 1982, p. 316.

[357] The date of this tragedy is highly significant from an Orthodox point of view. September 11 – August 29, according to the Orthodox calendar – is the feast/fastday of the Beheading of St. John the Forerunner. St. John is the prophet of repentance, and his beheading signified the attempt by Herod to cut off his preaching of repentance. And so the time of repentance for the apostate Herodian West is near to being cut off…

Indeed, Archpriest Lev Lebedev, after comparing the skyscrapers of New York to the ziggurats of ancient Babylon and to the ancient tower of Babel, and pointing out that the apocalyptic number "666" is inscribed on one of the skyscrapers in the centre of Manhattan, writes: "The concept of the 'New Babylon' is not a figurative comparison, not a metaphor. New York, like other large cities, like the whole of America, is a true confusion of all the races of the world…"[358] We shall return to Archpriest Lev's interpretation later…

Finally, mention should be made of a possible connection between Babylon and *Islam*. Cyprian writes: "This crescent moon of the Moslems is a symbol of the goddess Aphrodite whom they worship, which in ancient times they called "Khabar", meaning great, according to St. John Damascene. Great, as in Babylon the Great. This Great Whore of the Apocalypse is said to sit on many waters. Aphrodite is said to have arisen from the waters of the sea, and the sea-foam (aphros)."[359]

When I saw her I wondered with great admiration. The apostle might well have wondered how a Church, or union of Churches, could become the persecutor of Christianity. The resolution of his perplexity was not long in coming…

[358] Lebedev, "The Universal Babylon", *Pravoslavnaia Zhizn',* 53, N 5 (640), May, 2003, p. 16 (in Russian).
[359] Cyprian, "Babylon, the Star and the Crescent", personal communication, January 24, 2008.

6. The Beast and the Whore

17.7-8. And the angel said to me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is, and yet is.

Speaking generally, if the **dragon** is Satan, and if the **beast** may be provisionally identified as satanic, antichristian political power (whether in personal or collective form), then the **whore** of Babylon may be seen as antichristian *religion or culture*. The beast **carries** the whore, i.e. supports her, in the same way that Nimrod's Babylon "carried" the religion that deified him and the culture that built the tower of Babel, and imperial Rome "carried" the cult of emperor-worship that was later reincarnated in the worship of the Pope. In modern times, Hitler's Germany "carried" the religion of nation-worship that we call Fascism, and Stalin's Russia "carried" the worship of History that we call Communism, or Dialectical Materialism. And, most recently, the all-conquering power of western-style Democracy has "carried" Ecumenism, which is its cognate in the religious sphere. Each of these relationships can be described as different phases in the adulterous union between the beast and the whore. This union between antichristian politics and false religion and culture is inevitable; for when our thoughts cease to be in heaven, and fall down towards the earth, then we become vulnerable to the lure of schemes that satisfy the natural man in his fallen, this-worldly condition - in other words, to politics. But politics divorced from true religion is the domain of **the prince of this world** (John 12.31), Satan, of him who once offered the true King **all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them**, if He would only fall down and worship him (Matthew 4.8). Membership of the whore must therefore inevitably lead to slavery to the beast; and it is to the closer examination of the beast that the seer's attention is now directed.

The union between false religion and politics is nothing to be wondered at, says the angel; for it goes back to earliest antiquity. Thus when Cain's religious offering was not accepted by God, while that of his brother Abel was, he murdered him; and, having murdered him, he proceeded to become the first builder of cities - in other words, the first politician (for the Greek word for "city" is polis) (Genesis 4.17). Since then false religion has taken its seat in the major urban civilizations; while true religion has been forced to flee from them into the wilderness, as Abraham fled from Ur and Lot from Sodom. Each of the major civilizations of the Mediterranean basin and the Middle East - Babylon-Assyria, Egypt, Persia and pre-Christian Greece and Rome - warred against the people of God. And in other parts of the world - the Indus valley, Mexico, Peru and China - the major civilizations became at the same time the major nesting-grounds of the most evil paganism.

Now the seer gives us new information about the beast, that it **was** in the past, **is not** now (in the first century, when the Apocalypse was written), **and yet is**, and **shall ascend out of the bottomless pit.** This is one of the most enigmatic passages in the Apocalypse, and a plausible interpretation of the figures of the beast and the whore depends critically on being able to interpret this passage successfully. Let us look at two possible interpretations: first in terms of *Roman* power, and then in terms of *Jewish* power.

Rome, although sometimes persecuting the people of God and therefore in the image of the beast, was recognized by the apostles as being in essence good, being **the minister of God** (Romans 13.4) and **that which restraineth** the spread of evil and the coming of the Antichrist (II Thessalonians 2.4). For the Pax Romana helped the spread of Christianity and protected the Christians from their chief enemies, the Jews (cf. the story of Paul's deliverance from the Jews in Acts 21-28). Moreover, the prophetic conscience of the Church could see the future transformation of the empire qua antichristian beast under Nero, Domitian and Diocletian into the empire qua Christian deliverer under St. Constantine and his successors.

As Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow writes: "The Spirit of God in [St. Paul] foresaw and more or less showed him the future light of Christian kingdoms. His God-inspired vision, piercing through future centuries, encounters Constantine, who brings peace to the Church and sanctifies the kingdom by faith; and Theodosius and Justinian, who defend the Church from the impudence of heresies. Of course, he also goes on to see Vladimir and Alexander Nevsky and many spreaders of the faith, defenders of the Church and guardians of Orthodoxy. After this it is not surprising that St. Paul should write: I beseech you not only to pray, but also to give thanks for the king and all those in authority; because there will be not only such kings and authorities for whom we should pray with sorrow…, but also those for whom we must thank God with joy for His precious gift."[360]

In this sense, therefore, Rome qua antichristian beast **was** before Christ, being the fourth beast in Daniel's vision, **was not** when it became **the minister of God** in the first century and especially during the whole period of the existence of the Christian Roman Empire in its successive reincarnations as the New Rome of Constantinople and the Third Rome of Moscow, **and yet** still **is** at the time of the writing of the Apocalypse, when the Emperor Domitian persecuted Christians, include the Apostle John himself.

So far so good; but this interpretation runs into severe difficulties with regard to the *future*, when the beast is said to **ascend out of the bottomless pit.**

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[360] Metropolitan Philaret, *Works*, Moscow, vol. III, p. 291 (in Russian). The transformation of the beast of antichristian political power into the protector of God's people had been anticipated even in the Old Testament, when Cyrus was given the title of **the Lord's anointed** by God Himself (Isaiah 45.1) because of his role in allowing the Jews under Zerubbabel to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, and Persian power saved the people of God under Mordechai and Esther from being exterminated.

Following the New Martyr Jacob and other interpreters (for example, Orlov), we have made a distinction between the beast that comes out of the sea and the beast that comes out of the bottomless pit. The beast from the sea is antichristian political power in its first seven heads or historical incarnations – Babylon, Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Macedon, Rome and Soviet power – especially the last, Soviet power (see below, on 17.10). The beast from the abyss, on the other hand, is the personal Antichrist himself, the *eighth* head, who represents, not a resurrection of *Roman* power, but its polar opposite – *Jewish* power. Of course, it is possible to argue, as Molenko among others has done, that the personal Antichrist will come to power in Rome and rule over the western half of the former Roman empire, the European Union, before moving his capital to Jerusalem and becoming the king of the Jews. But this interpretation is forced, and goes against the predominant patristic view that the Antichrist will come to power *on the ruins* of Roman power, and will establish the non-Roman and anti-Roman power of *Israel.*[361]

So let us turn to the second hypothesis, that the beast that **was** and **is not** and yet **is** is *Jewish power.*

Jewish power qua antichristian beast already **was**, that is, had ceased to exist by the time of the writing of the Apocalypse. It flourished from the time of the Crucifixion of Christ in 33 A.D. to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and was the chief threat to the existence of the Christian Church in that

[361] Thus St. Irenaeus writes: "John and Daniel prophesied the destruction of the Roman empire, which will precede the end of the world and the eternal Kingdom of Christ." (*Against Heresies*, V, 26). Again, St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes: "The Antichrist is to come when the times of the Roman empire shall have been fulfilled, and the end of the world is now drawing near. There shall rise up together ten kings of the Romans, reigning in different parts perhaps, but all about the same time. And after these an eleventh, the Antichrist, who by his magical craft shall seize upon the Roman power; and of the kings who reigned before him, **three he shall humble** (Daniel 7.24), and the remaining seven he shall keep in subjection to himself" (*Catechetical Lectures*, XV, 12). Cf. St. Hippolytus, who, referring to Nebuchadnezzar's vision in Daniel, writes: "The legs of iron, and the beast dreadful and terrible, expressed the Romans, who hold the sovereignty at present. The toes of the feet which were part clay and part iron, and the tens horns, were emblems of the kingdoms that are yet to arise. The other little horn that grows up among them meant the Antichrist in their midst... The ten toes of the image are equivalent to the same number of democracies, and the ten horns of the fourth beast are distributed over ten kingdoms" (*Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 28, 27). Again, St. John Chrysostom writes: "When the Roman Empire is taken out of the way he [the Antichrist] will come. And naturally. For as long as the fear of this empire lasts, no one will willingly exalt himself; but when that is dissolved, he will attack the anarchy, and endeavour to seize power, both human and Divine" (*Homily 4 on II Thessalonians*). Again, St. Narses of Armenia prophesied on his deathbed: "After this the liberation of all the lands of Christendom from the Aryan hosts shall be wrought by the Romans. And then the earth shall repose in goodly paths for long epochs, and shall become like a garden full of all things. The lawless shall be repulsed, and shall fall under the yoke of slavery to the Romans. And men will lament the past, and the goods which then failed them. After that shall be manifested the son of perdition, the Antichrist" (in Bousset, op. cit., p. 253). The same teaching is found in St. John of Damascus (*Commentary on II Thessalonians*, 2.7-8, *M.P.G.* 95, col. 24), Oecumenius (*Commentary on II Thessalonians*, 2.7-8, *M.P.G.* 119, col. 121AB), and Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria (*Commentary on Thessalonians* 2.5-8; *M.P.G.* 124, col. 1340-1344).

period. From 70 A.D., however, it **was not** until the promise of the creation of the State of Israel in 1917 or its actual creation in 1948.[362] And yet it still continued **to be** in an underground form, and made its presence felt in many murders, revolutions and other criminal deeds, forcing almost every Gentile government to expel it at one time or another. Then, in 1917, it finally broke through to real political power simultaneously in Israel and Russia, having already attained considerable power over the counsels of most western governments, and especially America. This power was felt by many, especially in Russia, to be the product of the infernal abyss, *satanic* in essence. Which is why the Local Council of the Russian Church formally anathematised Soviet-Jewish power in 1918 – the first time in history that the Church has anathematised a secular political power – precisely because it was not a purely secular power, but the political expression of the religion of the Antichrist. However, Soviet power, though Jewish in essence, is still only the *seventh* head of the beast according to our interpretation, and it, as we have seen, will be destroyed in the Third World War. The full, and seemingly completely secure triumph of Jewish power will not be seen until the enthronement of *the eighth head,* the personal Antichrist, in Jerusalem. And yet even this beast **shall go into perdition**, destroyed by Christ Himself at His Second Coming**.**[363]

They that dwell on the earth, whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world shall wonder at, and scarcely believe, this transformation of the Jews from the chosen people of God, the people of Christ Himself, the Mother of God and the Apostles into the people of the Antichrist. But it should be no surprise to us Christians who study the Holy Scriptures in the light of Holy Tradition. From the study of Tradition we know that the beginning of the fall of the Jews from the chosen people of God into the chief enemies of God may be traced to their exile in – significantly - *Babylon*. It was here that the seeds of Talmudism and Cabbalism, and the teaching that the Jews were the super-race destined to rule all other races, were sown by the new sect of the Pharisees. It was largely because Christ refused to subscribe to this teaching that the Jews crucified Him.[364]

However, it was only after the Crucifixion of Christ and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. that this heretical trend came to dominate the hearts and minds of the apostate Jews. And when the leaders of the Sanhedrin chose Babylon as the centre of their underground government, it was there that the most influential expression of Jewish Antichristianity, the Babylonian Talmud,

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[362] It could be argued that the kingdom of Khazars in Eastern Russia was a resurrection of Jewish power in the Christian period. However, it had little time to show its antichristian nature before it was destroyed by Sviatoslav the (pagan) prince of Kiev in the tenth century.

[363] "The word translated '**perdition**' has the same root as '**Apollyon**', the name of the angel from the bottomless pit (9.11). And so the final destiny of the destroyer is, ironically, destruction." (Rev. John Richardson, "The Destruction of Babylon: Part I (Rev. 17:1-18), *New Directions*, vol. 2, no. 44, January, 1999, p. 27).

[364] Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), "Christ the Savior and the Jewish Revolution", *Orthodox Life,* vol. 35, no. 4, July-August, 1988, pp. 11-31.

was composed. The Talmud originated in those circles which Christ so excoriated and which eventually killed Him. It represents a codification of the false traditions of the Pharisees, of which the Lord said: **Ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition,... teaching for doctrines the commandments of men** (Matthew 15.6,9). Although supposedly based on the Old Testament, the Talmud in fact undermines the teaching of the Old Testament at almost every point; for its driving force is hatred of Christ, Whom it reviles as a bastard and sorcerer, and of all non-Jews, the goyim, whose status is deemed no higher than that of animals, and whom the Talmud permits Jews to cheat, exploit and kill at will.[365] Even the worship that the Talmud and the Cabbala enjoin is not pure monotheism, but a mixture of pantheism, superstition, magic and paganism which the Jews adopted from their first Babylonian exile in the time of Nebuchadnezzar.[366]

Although the Jews were expelled from Babylon in 1040, Babylon has remained their spiritual homeland ever since. Thus the Talmud declares: "All countries are like dough to the land of Israel, and the land of Israel is like dough towards Babylon." And: "Whoever lives in Babylon is accounted as though he lived in the land of Israel." And again: "We have a tradition that Babel will not witness the sufferings that will precede the coming of the Messiah."[367]

Having left Babylon, the Sanhedrin re-established itself in Spain, and then, after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, in Poland. The Jewish inhabitants of Lithuania, Poland and Western Russia were mainly the descendants of a non-Semitic race of Jewish faith, the Khazars, who had emigrated there from the East after the destruction of Khazaria by the Mongols. They nurtured the antichristian and antigentile traditions of the Talmud with especial ferocity.

The Judaizing heresy of the early fifteenth century - the most serious heresy to afflict Russia before the Jewish revolution of 1917 - was the result of the Judaizers' infiltration of the highest levels of Church and State. Even after the West European Jews began to be assimilated into West European society after the French revolution, the Khazars resisted all attempts at assimilation. And when the conquests of Catherine the Great included a large part of this area within the Russian Empire, the serpent began to gnaw at the vitals of the empire from within.

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[365] See Douglas Reed, *The Controversy of Zion*, Durban, SA: Dolphin Press, 1978; I.B. Pranaitis, *The Talmud Unmasked,* St. Petersburg, 1892.

[366] Thus, to take one example from the domain of worship, the midsummer fast in honour of the Babylonian god Tammuz was practised by the exiled Jews in Babylon, was denounced by the Prophet Ezekiel - and continues to be practised by the modern Talmudic Jews! See Elizabeth Dilling, *The Jewish Religion: Its Influence Today*, The Noontide Press, 1983.

[367] Dilling, op. cit.. According to the tenth-century French monk Adso, the Antichrist will even be born in Babylon (*Libellus de Antichristo*, translated in O'Driscoll R. & Wills, J.J., *The New World Order in North America,* Toronto: The Printing House, 1993, Appendix III, p. 189).

The situation became critical after 1861, when Tsar Alexander II, as part of his emancipatory programme, threw open Russia's centres of higher education to the Jews for the first time. Now the doctrines of educated West European Jews, such as Marx, became the property of their East European brethren, such as Trotsky. And so by 1917 the empire's seven million fiercely anti-Russian and anti-Christian Jews were set to take their revenge on the Third Rome for the catastrophe they had suffered at the hands of the First, Old Rome over eighteen centuries earlier...

However, the destruction of the Third Rome, Russia, by the Bolsheviks was only one branch of the Jewish revolution that began to emerge in 1917: the other was the foothold gained by the Zionists in Palestine. For by an extraordinary "coincidence", the October revolution in Petrograd and the promise of a homeland to the Jews in Palestine by the British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour took place *at exactly the same time*, being reported *on the very same column of newsprint* in the *London Times* of November 9, 1917. It was as if the beast suddenly emerged out of the sea of the Gentile peoples, being visible simultaneously in two of its heads - one in Bolshevik Moscow, on the ruins of the last Orthodox empire, and the other in Zionist Jerusalem.

The return of the Jews to Israel, which was consolidated by the foundation of the Zionist State of Israel in 1948 with Great Britain and the Soviet Union as its sponsors, was prophesied by many of the prophets of the Old Testament. However, contrary to the assertions of many Protestant Evangelicals, this does not indicate that the God-hating Jews have become "the Bride of Christ" – for the simple reason that the Jewish people's hatred of Christ has not ceased. It is rather the continued fulfilment of God's covenant with the Jews: **Not for thy righteousness or for the uprightness of thine heart dost thou go up to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that He may keep the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people.** (Deuteronomy 9. 5-6). These words apply to the present state of Israel as much as to the state founded after the exodus from Egypt. It is not because the Jewish people is holy that they have been given back the land, but in order to fulfil the prophecies and **for the wickedness of these nations** – which in the modern context must include all the Gentile nations which, directly or indirectly, suffer from the **stiff-necked** and antichristian behaviour of the Jews. For their wickedness the Jewish Antichrist will be a fitting punishment…

Fr. Stefan Krasovitsky further explains the significance of the continued existence and power of the Jewish people: "If the Old Testament is understood as a foreshadowing, then one sees that the true Jews of the Old Testament are a foreshadowing of the Christians, since all the true Jews of the Old Testament lived spiritually in expectation of Christ the Savior, the Messiah. On the other hand, their enemies in the Old Testament are a

foreshadowing of contemporary Judaism, that is, those who either consciously or unconsciously confess the Jewish religion, the very foundation of this religion being a rejection of Christ. The Jewish religion which accepts Christ *is the Christian religion.*

"The first decree, the covenant with the Jewish people made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is never revoked, and therefore, in remaining a **special, different** people, since they did not accept Christianity, they repudiated their being the chosen people of God.

"Thus, it may be that the very preservation up until now of the Jewish people is a result not of their being 'chosen', but as a result of their apostasy. In fact, if the Jews, having repented of the crime committed on Golgotha, would have become Christian, then they would have made up the foundation of a new spiritual nation, the nation of Christians. Would they have begun to strive in this case to preserve their nationality and government? Would they not have dispersed among other nations as the missionaries of Christianity just as the Apostles? Would they not have been strangers in a foreign land, not having a fatherland, like unto Abraham, but in this case with a higher spiritual meaning? All this happened with the Jews, that is, they became wanderers, not in a positive spiritual sense, but due to a curse, that is, not of their own will, but due to the will of chastising Providence since they did not fulfil that which God intended for them. Would they not have been exterminated en masse during persecutions as the main preachers of Christianity? Would they not have been assimilated among other peoples, so that the very name 'Jew', 'Hebrew', as a national name, would have disappeared and would have only remained in the remembrance of grateful nations as the glorious name of their enlighteners? Yes, and the very Promised Land and Jerusalem were given to the Hebrews not as a worldly fatherland, for which they are now striving, but as a prefiguring of the Heavenly Kingdom and the Heavenly Jerusalem, as a token of which Abraham and through him all the Hebrew nation coming out of Haran, renounced their earthly fatherland. For this reason the very significance of Jerusalem and the idea as a prefiguring would have passed away for the Jews, as soon as the Kingdom of God and the Heavenly Jerusalem would have become obtainable for them and would have become for them, as they are now for us, Christian holy places.

"The second edict also cannot be changed, the New Testament covenant with Christians. For this reason, if for Christians there is no other chosen people besides the Christians themselves, then among the 'peoples' inhabiting the earth, the Jews must occupy an extraordinary position. We see that these people weaken as a nation through union with Christianity, their only salvation, because the Judaism which permeates them disintegrates and is annulled by this union. This is so because Christianity without Christ reverts to Judaism. Even those Jews who do not accept Christianity, being infected by the bacillus of anti-Christianity, manage to support their identity supported by the Old Testament covenant. For this reason the hope of the Jews for

universal supremacy is not in vain. This people will be preserved through all times; they will not be exterminated nor will they disintegrate. Other nations, especially Christian ones, will be preserved only by Christianity and will experience downfall and destruction only if they fall away from Christianity or weaken in their convictions. **For the nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee** (that is, serve Christianity) **shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted** (Isaiah 60.12).

"One cannot doubt that those who consciously confess the Jewish religion strive for the universal supremacy of Judaism, or rather of the Jews. If one were to read the Old Testament as the Jews do, that is, not spiritually, not interpreting the prefigurative meanings…, but in a carnal way, then it *would* seem that the prophecies speak about a future supremacy. For example, it is said: **For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem** (Isaiah 2.3). 'Here the New Testament is being spoken of,' writes St. John Chrysostom. 'This can be seen from the place and time, from the one who accepted the law, from history after the acceptance of the law, and in general from everything.' Firstly, for example, from the location: **out of Zion**. The law of Moses was given to the Hebrews on Mt. Sinai. Why is it written here: **out of Zion**? Not being satisfied with this alone, he added the time. He did not say 'goes forth', but **shall go forth**, which refers to a future time and to an event as yet not fulfilled. Later he indicates the place and says: **and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem**. Indeed, Christ taught lofty and heavenly commandments while sitting on the mountain (Zion) and while being in Jerusalem. However, the Jews who do not accept Christ refer this and other such prophecies to 'a future time and subject, as yet not fulfilled'. They understand them carnally, in a worldly sense, namely that there shall still come a law from Zion, from Jerusalem, and therefore not only for the Jewish people, as for the Hebrews the law of Moses had already been given on Mt. Sinai, but for the whole world, a law in a carnal sense, as a 'government' or 'authority', an already given law, since the Jews only recognize the first given law of Moses. For this reason the religion of the Jews is directed towards the future, to meet the Messiah, not Christ, but rather the Antichrist, who must establish the supremacy of the Jews and Judaism upon the whole world. In this we see the difference between the philosophies of Judaism and Christianity. That is, while Christians seek the Heavenly Kingdom, the Jews seek an earthly kingdom, the improvement of the world under the supremacy of the Jewish people who exert great efforts in aspiring towards the fulfilment of this idea, **for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light** (Luke 16.8). For this very reason the Jews crucified the Lord, Who did not become the Messiah in their understanding, Who did not guarantee worldly well-being, Who did not free them from the Roman authority, but Who preached a Heavenly Kingdom, a Kingdom not of this world. In other words, the Jewish idea is a deification of materialism.

"This Jewish materialistic approach openly or more subtly, under the appearance of various social theories and philosophical systems, encroaches upon the consciousness of Christians, breaking down the Christian nations. In

particular the penetration into the Christian consciousness of this Judaistic idea explains many heresies, the rise of Islam, the substitution of Christianity with humanism, altruism, Marxism and separatist nationalism. Nationalism, which at times takes on an anti-Semitic character, at other times ends up in union with Judaism; in any event it is the reverse side of Jewish philosophy. A nation is truly attractive only in that part of it which is Christian. On the other hand, separatist nationalism, that is the extolling of a nation because it is a particular nation, refers back to the incorrect and prideful Jewish understanding of their chosenness, when they boast, 'We are the children of Abraham'.

"This activity of Judaistic philosophy is responsible for the striving towards the worldly in Christian societies, the wasting of spiritual talents for the worldly, that is, the burying of them, which explains the direction of present-day civilization towards 'progress', the ruining of our planet, modern pagan art, and so on.

"Thus the Jews may obtain supremacy, resulting from the breakdown of the Christian peoples, that is, from an open or subtle falling away from Christianity, which can be viewed as a direct influence of Jewish philosophy. In the end they will bring forth from their midst the Antichrist, their messiah, upon whom they hope…"[368]

17.9. And here is the mind that hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth.

Rome is situated on seven hills. However, two other important cities are also situated on seven hills: *Constantinople and Moscow*. Thus the fact of being situated on seven hills mystically links Old Rome in Italy, the New Rome of Constantinople and the Third Rome of Moscow. But from 1917 the whore of false religion was seen sitting on each of these former champions of Christian Truth - Papism in Rome, Islam in Constantinople and Militant Atheism in Moscow, in fulfilment of the prophecy: **O how has the faithful city, Zion, once full of judgement, become an harlot!** (Isaiah 1.21) – become Babylon! However, "mountain" in Holy Scripture can have the meaning of "kingdom", as in Daniel 2.35 and Jeremiah 51.25. Thus in saying that the seven heads are seven mountains, the Holy Spirit may be alluding to the interpretation that the heads are kingdoms[369], which interpretation follows explicitly in the next verse:

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[368] Krasovitsky, "How to understand the Jews as being a chosen people", *Orthodox Life,* vol. 41, no. 4, July-August, 1991, pp. 38-41.

[369] The seven hills have also been interpreted, less convincingly, to mean the seven rulers of Russia during the Soviet period – Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko and Gorbachev (K.V., op. cit., p. 7). However, according to the Prophetess Helena of the Caucasus (+1977), Gorbachev was the *eighth* Soviet ruler. "Matushka Helena was also a prophetess. In 1955 Christopher Damianides, aged 18, was told by his parents to go to Matushka to ask her whether there would be a war. 'No,' she replied. 'There will be no war.' 'And how will the situation develop?' asked Christopher. 'The eighth leader [of the Soviet

17.10. And they are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short time.

The first five of these seven kingdoms are: Babylon, Egypt, Assyria, Persia and Macedon, which had all **fallen** at the time of the writing of the Apocalypse. The sixth is Rome, because Rome still **is (was)** at the time of writing. The seventh, which **is not yet come**, would be Soviet power, **which must continue a short time** – even supposing that Soviet power did not end in 1991, it has not existed for a long time, historically speaking.

17.11. And the beast that was, and is not, and yet is, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.

The beast of antichristian political power, which has found partial incarnations in the first seven kingdoms, will find its complete and perfect incarnation in an eighth king, who is *the beast himself* (as opposed to one of his heads or horns). This eighth head or king, as we have argued, is the king of the Jews, the personal Antichrist. He will combine in himself all the evil of all the Pharaohs, Caesars and Commissars that preceded him. He is said to be **of the seven** "because he has made his appearance from one of these kingdoms" (Archbishop Averky). If the kingdom in question is Russia, the seventh head of the beast, then this accords with the prophecy of St. Seraphim that the Antichrist will be born in Russia. In other words, the Antichrist will be a Jew of the tribe of Dan, but born in Russia.

But this eighth king **was, and is not, and yet is.** In other words, he is the same as that *Jewish power* which in St. John's time had been temporarily crushed after 70 AD, but which still remained in existence. [370]

17.12-18. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. They shall have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. They will wage war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for He is the Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with Him are called and chosen and faithful. And he said to me, The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and

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Union] is called Michael [i.e. Michael Gorbachev, the eighth Soviet leader since Lenin]. He will be young and good-looking. He will change the situation. However, there will come great poverty. But finally good times will come…'" (Antonios Markou, "St. Helena of the Caucasus", Koropi, Attica, 2001 (in Greek))

[370] However, New Martyr Jacob believes that "the second section of the last time [the first section is the period of Soviet power] is **the beast [that] was and is not,** or the time of the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world." See Fr. (now Bishop) Victor Pivovarov, "The Life of the Catacomb Ascetic Jacob Fyodorovich Arkatov", http://www.omolenko.com/texts/arkatov.htm (in Russian).

burn her up with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth.

Clearly related to this is the following from Daniel: **I looked, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible and exceeding strong, and its teeth were of iron; and it was altogether different from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I noticed his horns, and, behold, another little horn came up in the midst of them, and before it three of the former horns were rooted out: and behold, there were eyes as the eyes of a man in this horn, and a mouth speaking great things… As I looked, this horn made war with the saints, and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgement was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom.** (7.7-8, 21-22).

This fourth beast, according to St. Hippolytus, is the Roman empire (the first three beasts are the Babylonian, Medo-Persian and Greek empires, respectively). So the ten horns are offshoots of the Roman empire, perhaps ten states that come into being on its territory or from its peoples. Hippolytus goes on to identify these ten horns of Daniel 7 with the ten toes of the image in Daniel 2 (33,41-43), and says that they are "*the same number of democracies*, kingdoms which are still to come". The eleventh, or **little horn**, which is also the eighth head, is the Antichrist, or the Jewish state that he will rule.[371]

St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes: "The Antichrist is to come when the times of the Roman empire shall have been fulfilled, and the end of the world is drawing near. There shall rise up together ten kings of the Romans, reigning in different parts perhaps, but all about the same time. And after these an eleventh, the Antichrist, who by his magical craft shall seize upon the Roman power; and of the kings who reigned before him **three shall he subdue** (Daniel 7.24), and the remaining seven he shall keep in subjection to himself... It is plain that by subduing three of these ten, he will become the eighth king; **and he shall speak words against the Most High** (Daniel 7.25). A blasphemer the man is and lawless, not having received the kingdom from his fathers, but having usurped the power by means of sorcery."[372]

Again, St. John Chrysostom writes: "What does the little horn signify? I affirm that the Antichrist will emerge from between several kings... Why is it small and does not appear great from the beginning? Because it will grow later and will conquer several kings."[373]

Again, Blessed Jerome writes: "We must say what all the church writers have handed down, that at the end of the world, when the Roman kingdom

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[371] St. Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 27.
[372] St. Cyril, *Catechetical Lectures*, XV, 12, 13.
[373] St. Chrysostom, *On Daniel*, ch. 7, *M.P.G.* LVI, col. 230.

will have been destroyed, there will be ten kings who will divide the Roman world between them. The only king who is not great will rebel and conquer three of the kings."[374]

Again, Blessed Theodoretus of Cyrus writes: "At the end of the Roman kingdom at one and the same time ten kings shall be established, who will cause each other much harm and will wage war against each other... And when this happens, the man of iniquity, the son of perdition, that is, the Antichrist, will arise... The last events of the Roman kingdom will be similar to the division of the Macedonian kingdom... The ten horns on the fourth beast, which appear at the same time, signify ten kings who will rule at one and the same time on the territory of the Roman empire. However, one of them, the southern king, will again enter into war with those who are called the northern kings. For it is said: **Out of the north evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land** (Jeremiah 1.14)."[375]

Lopukhin writes: "The kings symbolized by horns represent kingdoms that are not independent. If they receive royal power, that is, the right to rule, this is only together with the beast as their false-pastor, and that only for a short time, for **one hour**. These are therefore representatives of the peoples and kingdoms of the last time. They are distinct from the kings, the representatives of the world states which are called the heads of the beast (St. Irenaeus, St. Ephraim the Syrian). The Antichrist will in a masterly way exploit these representatives (horns) of the peoples and kingdoms, their moods and way of thinking; and will unite them together in one earthly state for the struggle with the Lamb and against Christianity."[376]

What, then, are these ten kingdoms? John Brown argued that they were the "ten or several kingdoms into which the western empire of Rome was divided when the papal power was established, all of which submitted to the popish abominations."[377] However, the Roman Catholic states of Europe were absolutist, whereas St. Hippolytus says that the ten kingdoms will be *democracies*. So some more recent Protestant interpreters, together with the Orthodox interpreter Fr. Oleg Molenko, have proposed that they are to be identified with the States of the European Union, which are indeed the successors of the western empire. But there are now many more than ten States in the European Union…

Perhaps the ten kingdoms are not confined to Western Europe, but cover the whole territory over which Western Europe has spread its civilization – which is now, more or less, the whole world. Therefore perhaps we should see in the ten kingdoms *ten provinces of the future world government*, "the New World Order", which is to be ruled by the Antichrist. "In 1959 the

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[374] St. Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, VII, 8, col. 531A.
[375] St. Theodoretus, *On Daniel* 11.4, 11.40, *M.P.G.* LXXXI, col. 1504-1505, 1529.
[376] Lopukhin, op. cit., p. 588.
[377] John Brown, *Self-Interpreting Bible*, London: Murdoch, p. 1117.

organization of the World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA) was founded. Its members in their turn are representatives of such organizations as, for example: the United Nations, the World Council of Churches, Green Peace, the World Muslim Congress, the Council on Foreign Relations, the World Court, and the ambassadors and ministers of many countries. This organization has already arranged several meetings of a Provisional World Parliament and passed eleven laws of a World Codex of laws. It is interesting that the WCPA has divided the whole world into *ten kingdoms*, employing precisely that term in English: 'kingdoms'. It is proposed that a new world financial system will be introduced immediately the first *ten countries* confirm a World Constitution, since the remaining countries will then be forced to accept this constitution for economic reasons. At the present time the WCPA is trying to convene a Constitutional Assembly so as to substitute the constitution of the USA for the World Constitution. In 1990 the WCPA sent a letter to all heads of government in which it declared the formation of a World Government, and after this many leaders of states openly began to speak about the New World Order."[378]

Against this hypothesis, however, is the fact that **the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire.** It is unlikely that a future world government will destroy the antichristian civilization of the West, when it will itself be a product of that civilization. Or is it?…

A convincing interpretation has to take into account the existence of a conflict between *two antagonistic antichristian forces*: the beast and his allies, the ten kingdoms, on the one hand, and the harlot of western civilization, on the other. Now we have already identified *Soviet Russia or its successor-state* as the most likely candidate for the role of the seventh head of the beast. Is it possible, therefore, that the ten horns are ten descendants, not of the *western*, but of the *eastern* Roman empire?

The territory of the former eastern Roman empire is now occupied by mainly Islamic states (and Israel). Maybe, therefore, it is a group of Islamic states that joins forces with a resurrected Soviet Russia in order to go to war with western civilization (and Israel). In Ezekiel 38.5 three Middle Eastern states are described as being in alliance with Gog and Magog (Russia and her northern allies) – Libya, Iran and Ethiopia. If we substitute neighbouring Sudan for Ethiopia, then we have a very likely alliance in terms of present-day politics. If we add to this group other Middle Eastern states such as Armenia, Syria, perhaps Azerbaidjan and the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kirgizia, then we are well on the way to assembling a ten-state group that could well be allied with Russia…[379]

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[378] *Orthodox Russia*, N 15, 1992, p. 16 (in Russian).

[379] During the Cold War period, Protopriest Boris Molchanov proposed a similar hypothesis: "The complete triumph of the political Apostasy, in accordance with the indication of the Word of God, can take place with the final formation of *ten* rebellious, apostate states. In view of the fact that some new rebellious state formations have not yet taken their final shape,

This idea will be rejected by those who believe that the Cold War stand-off is irrevocably a thing of the past, and that Russia has now become a "democratic" state that is well on the way to being fully integrated into the global civilization of the West, especially after the disaster of September 11, 2001, which brought Russia in as an ally of the West in the war against terrorism. However, the stand-off between Russia and America in Kosovo in 1999, and again in Iraq in 2003 in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014, show that disagreements and rivalries still simmer beneath the surface. Moreover, the formerly communist peoples of Eastern Europe and Russia are almost as passionately opposed to the globalistic project of western civilization as the Muslim peoples to the south of them. And while it is highly unlikely that present-day Russia will revert to old-style communism, under Putin it increasingly sees itself as the successor-state of the Soviet Union rather than its antithesis. Therefore a revival of Russian power under a leader determined to avenge the defeat of the Cold War could well lead to a resumption of hostilities with the West.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons writes of the allies of the beast: "They shall lay Babylon waste, and burn her with fire, and shall give their kingdom to the beast, and put the Church to flight."[380] So clearly the True Church will suffer together with Babylon. This is consistent with the witness of the Catacomb Church Eldress Seraphima of Michurinsk (+1955), who prophesied that there would be a final persecution of all the Russian Christians, who would be imprisoned on the Arctic island of Novaya Zemlya. This prophecy goes on to say that the Christians will be saved by a sudden change of temperature for the warmer on the island.[381]

They will wage war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for He is the Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with Him are called and chosen and faithful. The victors, together with the Lord Himself, will be the new martyrs and confessors of Russia and Eastern Europe – not only those from the Soviet period that is past, but also those from the period of the revival of the beast which we are discussing. They confess that Christ is **the Lord of lords and King of kings** - that is, that no earthly power has the right to force people to break the law of God, which is above all laws and rulers.

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since many may unite with others into one state, one cannot now list them exactly. One can say that apostate power is taking root in Soviet Russia, in China, in Yugoslavia, in Romania, in Hungary, in Bulgaria, in Poland... But it is difficult and futile to guess when this process will end. One other very important and significant consequence of the [Second] World War, which is also among the signs of the Apostasy, was the growth of the **little horn** in the form of the formation of the state of *Israel*. It is likewise futile to try and guess when this state will be finally formed, and within what frontiers." (*The Epoch of the Apostasy and the End of our Earthly Life*, Taiwan, 1980 (in Russian)). A variant of this hypothesis declared that the ten states are the "9+1" states who were planning to create a renewed union of socialist states just before the putsch of August, 1991, which disrupted their plans and made it last only **one hour (**K.V., op. cit., p. 9).

[380] St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 26.

[381] Schema-Monk Epiphanius (Chernov), personal communication.

Those who obey the law of God, in spite of all the threats of earthly lords and kings, are **called and chosen and faithful.**

There is strong evidence from the prophecies that the destruction of the whore by the beast represents the destruction of western civilization during a third world war at the hands of a neo-Soviet State together with its allies.

Let us consider two of these prophecies. First, in 1053 an anonymous Athonite prophet predicted the main events of twentieth-century history, culminating in the following: "Battle of seven states for Constantinople and slaughter for three days. Victory of the largest state over the six. Union of the six states against the seventh, Russia, and slaughter for three days. *Cessation of the war by an Angel of Christ God,* and handing over of the city to the Greeks. Submission of the Latins to the unerring faith of the Orthodox. Exaltation of the Orthodox faith from the East to the West. *Cessation of the Roman papacy.* Declaration of one patriarch for the whole of Europe for five or fifty years. In the seventh is no wretched man; no one is banished. Returning to the arms of Mother Church rejoicing. Thus shall it be. Thus shall it be. Amen."[382]

Secondly, St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher says: "All the nations of Europe will be armed against Russia. The Tsar [i.e. the Russian leader] will summon all his European and Asiatic peoples. The belligerents will meet in an immensely wide plain where a terrific battle will be fought and will last for eight days. The result will be a victory of the West over the Russians."[383]

The time-scale of the two prophecies is remarkably similar: two three-day battles in the first, and one eight-day battle in the second. Perhaps there will be a two-day pause between the two three-day battles, making the whole period of hostilities last for eight days. In any case, the final victory will be with the West - but only after suffering devastation in the first part of the conflict; for, as Elder Aristocles prophesied, "America will feed the world, but will finally collapse".

If this interpretation is correct, then chapter eighteen represents the rejoicing of the Heavenly Church over the destruction of the antichristian civilization of the West by the beast of a renewed (but still not genuinely Christian) Russia, while the nineteenth chapter represents the rejoicing of the Church over the destruction of this similarly antichristian power in the East.[384]

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[382] Sotiropoulos, op. cit.

[383] *The Posthumous Instructions of St. Nilus the Myrrh-Gusher*, 1912, part 1 (in Russian); "St. Nilus the Myrrh-Gusher and his Prophecies about the Final Judgements of our World", *Orthodox Russia*, N 22 (1403), November 15/28, 1989 (in Russian).

[384] According to St. John of Kronstadt, Elder Aristocles of Moscow and Elder Theodosy of Minvody, Russia and China will destroy each other, leading to the liberation of Russia. See V. Moss, "The Philadelphian Church", op. cit., pp. 39-40, 46.

Although the above is the hypothesis that we prefer, we may pose the question: supposing that the beast which destroys Babylon is not the collective Antichrist in his seventh major incarnation (i.e. Soviet power or its revival in a new form in the near future), but the *personal* Antichrist, what is the whore that *he* could destroy?

In answer to this question, Ivan Marchevsky points to the famous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the most reliable source we have, from the Jewish side, for the plans of the Jewish Antichrist: "When we at last definitely come into our kingdom by the aid of coups d'etat prepared everywhere for one and the same day, after the worthlessness of all existing forms of government has been definitely acknowledged (and not a little time will pass before that comes about, perhaps even a whole century), we shall make it our task to see that against us such things as plots shall no longer exist. With this purpose we shall slay without mercy all who take arms (in hand) to oppose our coming into our kingdom. Every kind of new institution of anything like a secret society will also be punished with death; those of them which are now in existence, are known to us, serve us and have served us, we shall disband and send into exile to continents far removed from Europe. *In this way we shall proceed with these* GOY *masons who know too much*; such of these as we may for some reason spare will be kept in constant fear of exile. We shall promulgate a law making all former members of secret societies liable to exile from Europe as the centre of our rule."[385]

1917 again! Just as the masons, who prepared the February, 1917 revolution in Russia in the name of the revolution, were swept away in October by the *real* revolutionaries, so, at the end of the world, the masons, whose whole activity and religious ritual exists for the sake of the enthronement of the Antichrist, will again be swept away by the Antichrist himself, for whom no bonds of loyalty or gratitude are sacred. For while **no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church** (Ephesians 5.29), the Antichrist has quite the opposite kind of relationship to *his* "Church", International Freemasonry: he **will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire**. Thus will Christ God work His unfathomable justice on His enemies, by turning them against each other; and only the last of them, the Antichrist himself, will He Himself kill, slaying him **with the breath of His mouth** at His Second and Glorious Coming...

[385] Marchevsky, op. cit., p. 213; *Protocol* 15.

7. The Triumph of Orthodoxy: (i) The Fall of the West

Chapter 18 portrays the rejoicing of the Church, and the lamentation of the world, over the destruction of the whore - western civilisation and religion as the culmination and consummation of all the religious evil since Nimrod's Babylon.

18.1-2. And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

This angel **having great power** may be the same as the **mighty angel** of Revelation 10.1, which in turn may be identified with the Archangel Michael in Daniel 12.1. As we have seen, the anonymous prophet of 1053 says that the Third World War will be brought to an end by "an angel of Christ God". And the Archangel Michael's role in destroying Gog and Magog's forces in Israel is described in Ezekiel 39 and by St. Ephraim the Syrian.

The description of the modern Babylon's desolation recalls Isaiah's of the ancient Babylon: **Wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; an owl shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there** (13.21).

And of Zephaniah's: **This is the exultant city that dwelt secure, that said to herself, 'I am and there is none else.' What a desolation she has become, a lair for wild beast! Every one who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist** (2.15).

18.3-4. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

If **the wine of her fornication** is the pan-heresy of ecumenism, then the call to God's people to come out of Babylon is the call to come out, not geographically from the countries of the West, but spiritually from the religion of the West - ecumenism. **Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you** (II Corinthians 6.17). For it is not enough to disown a heresy in one's heart while communing with it in public - **with the mouth confession is made unto salvation** (Romans 10.10). **Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven** (Matthew 10.32-33).

"**Come out of her, My people.** As it was spoken to Lot in Sodom, **Escape for thy life** (Genesis 19.17), and in Isaiah (52.11), so it is said here; for one should avoid contact and cohabitation with those who offend God" (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

The Prophet Jeremiah writes: **Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance; He will render unto her a recompense. Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad. Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed; howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed; forsake her, and depart every one to his country: for her judgement has reached to heaven, it has mounted up to the stars** (28.6-9).

Developing the hypothesis that Babylon is Judaeo-masonry, Ivan Marchevsky writes: "The Babylonian captivity (6th century B.C.) cleansed the people from superstition and returned it to the faith of their forefathers, but the Pharisees considered it wiser to develop the pagan teaching of God, which drives out the concept of the Creator. This was Chaldean pantheism combined with tribal racism. Thus through demonic inspiration and human pride one part of the captivity in Babylon fell away into idol-worship (cf. Ezekiel 14.3 et seq., 20.32; Jeremiah 10.1 et sq.; Isaiah 65.1 et sq.). This religion of the worship of man was led by the Pharisees, who hid behind the hypocritical performance of fabricated and unnecessary rites. They developed their new teaching in their closed meetings, true secret communities, which during the Babylonian captivity had many adherents, but in the time of Josephus Flavius (38-100 A.D.) numbered no more than six thousand.

"They distorted the meaning of the Law and the Prophets, applying 'allegorism' which kills the meaning of the Scripture. This was placed at the foundation of the Talmud and Cabala. As a rule, the same system is always adopted by all heresies, beginning with the Judaistic Gnostics, Bogomils and Cathars, up to the contemporary Satanists. The Pharisaic idea of the Messiah as a temporal king and destroyer of the non-Jews replaced the God-oriented faith in Emmanuel, Whose Divine origin and untarnished glory was glorified by the holy King David, while His extreme humiliation in the work of redemption was proclaimed by the Prophets. They replaced the Orthodox faith in paradise and hell by the false teaching about the migration of the soul, which was taken from the Chaldeans.

"Our Saviour exposed the godlessness of the Pharisees (Matthew 15.1-9, 23.1-39), and so they spitefully crucified the Redeemer Who gave a helping hand to every sinner. They mockingly said...: **His blood be upon us and upon our children** (Matthew 27.25).

"In the Talmudic writings the idea of the superiority of the works of the Rabbis over the God-inspired Bible is constantly repeated:

"'The words of the Talmud are sweeter than the words of the Testament.' Consequently:

"'Sins against the Talmud are more serious than sins against the Bible.'

"This false teaching gives a papal-like infallibility to the Rabbis of all times and on all occasions, even when they contradict each other.

"In order to ridicule God and the Bible, the Pharisees tried to fill the Talmud with stories (the Haggada) of a fabulous nature. For example: as a consequence of God's allowing the Temple to be destroyed, it has become smaller and is now no more than four cubits above the earth! The eclipse of the Word of God by the false teaching of the Talmud was prophesied by the Prophet Isaiah: **The vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. When men give it to one who can read, saying, Read this, he says, I cannot, for it is sealed. And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, Read this, he says, I cannot read. And the Lord said: Because this people draws near with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, while their hearts are far from Me, and their fear of Me is a commandment of men learned by rote; therefore, behold, I will again do marvellous things with this people, wonderful and marvellous; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hid** (29.11-14).

"The same is witnessed by a former Pharisaic scholar - the holy Apostle Paul. He writes about the veil which covers the Jews when they read the Law and the Prophets (cf. II Corinthians 3.14-16).

"The Rabbis explain the unnatural inclinations of a man as the rebirth of women into men, and so they are lenient to this sin.

"The ancient enemies of the Christians offer up their blood in sacrifice with a ritual aim. They consider that if they rejected the true Messiah, this will save them. This is the way they support their extraordinary superstition.

"In the treatise 'Sukhan-arukh' it is said: 'You must not use the blood of a swine or a beast, but you may use human blood for our benefit.'

"This is morally permissible for the Jews. In the treatise 'Avoda Zara' we read: 'This is how to understand the phrases concerning bloodshed. If a pagan kills a pagan or a Jew, he will be responsible for this. But if a Jew has killed a pagan, he is not responsible'…

"This is their ethics, which we must become familiar with... God prophesied of the apostles: **They will cast you out of the synagogues. Indeed,**

the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God (John 16.2)."[386]

18.5-13. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and give unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord that judgeth her. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgement come. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more; the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyme wood, and all manner of vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.

The antichristian civilization of the West is fabulously wealthy, far wealthier and more luxurious than any civilization that has preceded it. Its wealth has increased fairly steadily over nine hundred years, and exponentially in the period since the end of the Second World War - that is, in exactly inverse ratio to its spiritual decline. Nor is this surprising; for as the Lord said, **hardly will a rich men enter the Kingdom of the heavens** (Matthew 19.23). Some rich men have, with God's help, entered the Kingdom, and many poor men, led astray by envy and other passions, have fallen short of it. But no nation distinguished for its piety has had a generally high level of material prosperity. And conversely, no nation distinguished for its impiety has not suffered the just vengeance of God. We think of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose sins the West has imitated on a huge scale. These verses indicate that the West will suffer the same fate as Sodom, thereby proving **in one hour** the bankruptcy of nine hundred years of her civilization, and especially in its modern, most arrogant phase, when she **sits as a queen**, and thinks that through her science and material resources she **will see no sorrow**. Alas for Babylon! - all her fabulous wealth will be destroyed. And at the time of writing, 2009, this prophecy appears to be being fulfilled as the western banking system collapses. However, the worst aspect of Babylon's fall is the fact that **the souls of** the **men** that delight in her will go to perdition.

[386] Marchevsky, op. cit., pp. 224-226.

And you said, I shall be a lady forever, so that you did not take these things to heart, nor remember the latter end of them. Therefore hear this now, you who are given to pleasures, who dwell securely, who say in your heart, I am, and there is no one else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children; but these two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day: the loss of children, and widowhood. (Isaiah 47.7-9).

"The Freemasons often call themselves 'sons of the widow' because the builder of Solomon's temple, Hiram, was **the son of a widow from the tribe of Nephthalim** (cf. III Kings 7.13-14). So through their apostasy they have fulfilled the words of the psalm: **Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow** (108.8)."[387]

18.14-19. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches are come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea stood afar off, and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city! And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, What city is like unto this great city! And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

Here again the enormous wealth of Western culture and civilization is emphasized, and the consequent sorrow which its collapse will cause for its lovers. The merchants may be understood literally as businessmen and financiers, or as the purveyors of ideas - the philosophical and religious ideas of Europe and America. And again the suddenness of her collapse, compared with her long historical development, is stressed. Similarly sudden was the collapse of the Western Roman empire in the fifth century, which prompted St. Augustine to write *The City of God*. The city of man is bound to collapse, because it is built on worldly principles: only the City of God, the Church of Christ, will survive the conflagration of the world, for her foundations are sure, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone (Ephesians 2.20).

18.20. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.

Ecumenism, the religion of the West, embraces all the heresies and abominations of past ages; it is truly "the heresy of heresies". Therefore not

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[387] Marchevsky, op. cit., p. 226.

only the true Christians of the last times, but also the holy apostles and prophets who combated these heresies in the past, can be said to be revenged on Babylon. And their rejoicing over her fall is righteous; for, as the Venerable Bede says, "the souls of the righteous cry out these things, not from hatred of enemies, but from love of justice."[388]

18.21-24. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee; for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

The image of the millstone recalls the frightening words of the Lord: **Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea** (Matthew 18.6-7). Crimes against children - abortion, pederasty, sexual abuse, torture - are common in the so-called "civilized" society of the modern Babylon. There may be a hint **here** that such crimes are one of the reasons for the destruction of Babylon.

"In the last verses of this chapter (21-23) the sudden wrath of God, which will strike this city, is indicated. Its destruction will take place as quickly as when a millstone is cast into the sea, and will be so striking, that not the slightest trace of the city will be left, as is indicated by the words: **and the voice of the harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more**, etc. In the last, 24th verse, the reason for Babylon's destruction is indicated, that **in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth**." (Archbishop Averky).

The blood of prophets and of saints has indeed been shed by the West in the course of the 900 years since her apostasy from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Beginning with the bloody, papist-inspired conquest of England in 1066, through the sacrileges of the Crusades and the conquest of Constantinople in 1204, continuing with the Teutonic knights' invasion of Novgorod in 1242, the Unia imposed at the edge of the sword in western Russian and the Ukraine (16th-17th centuries), the Swedish invasion of Russia (early 18th century), the Napoleonic invasion of Russia (1812), the Crimean War (essentially an Anglo-French invasion of Russia in defence of the anti-Christian Turkish empire) and the First World War (caused by Austria-Hungary's desire to conquer Orthodox Serbia, and fuelled by Germany's desire to conquer Orthodox Russia), and coming to a climax with the

[388] St. Bede, *On Genesis* 4.10.

slaughter of 700,000 Orthodox Serbs in 1941 for their refusal to become papists - all this blood is on the conscience of the West. Even the Orthodox of the New World have not escaped this scourge. Thus in 1815 the Franciscans of San Francisco tortured to death the Orthodox Aleut Indian Peter for his refusal to renounce Orthodoxy.

But all this pales into insignificance by comparison with the blood of the millions of Orthodox Christians who died for rejecting that quintessentially western doctrine - Communism, the deadly bacillus which was nurtured in the English and French revolutions and then injected into the blood of Holy Russia by Marx, Lenin and the Kaiser. From that time Russia became an outpost of Western civilisation, and the Babylon of the West acquired an eastern capital in Moscow. And in recognition of this, the West never waged war on Communism, but greeted the overthrow of the Tsar with joy, entered into diplomatic and commercial relations with Stalin, hailed his victory in World War Two, and legitimised all his conquests in the Helsinki Treaty of 1975. Since the "fall" of Communism, the westernization of Russia has speeded up, and all the "freedoms" of western civilisation which the Russians were denied in the Soviet period were afforded them, from hamburgers and rock music to drugs, prostitution, and the systematic corruption of the young. Freemasonry has now replaced Communism [389], while the sins of Communism remain unrepented of.

"It is beyond doubt," wrote Archimandrite Justin Popovich: "Europe is not afflicted with atheism, but with polytheism; it suffers not from a lack, but from an excess of gods. Having lost the genuine God, it sought to tame its hunger for Him by creating a multitude of false gods, of idols. It has made idols of science and its hypotheses; of technology and its inventions; of politics and its parties; of fashion and its mannequins. And in the midst of all these idols, it has seated upon the cosmic throne of egoism the European man, the European 'Dalai Lama'...

"The structure of European culture, erected without Christ, must collapse, and soon, as the clairvoyant Dostoyevsky and the melancholy Gogol foresaw over a century ago... The prophecies of the Slavic seers are being fulfilled in our times. The European tower of Babel has been under construction for ten centuries, and, lo, it is ours to behold the tragic vision: the building is but a vast nullity! In the ensuing commotion, man has struck out against man, state against state, nation against nation, and even continent against continent.

"European man is afflicted with vertigo. At the apex of his tower of Babel he has set his superman as the completion of the structure, but the superman went made and plunged from the tower, which is now tumbling in his wake through wars and revolutions. Homo Europaicus had of necessity to turn mad in the terminal phase of his culture: the deicide had necessarily to

[389] Cf. the prophecy of Hieroconfessor Theodore (Rafanovsky) of Belorussia, who died in 1975: "The Masons will remove the communists and take control of Russia".

become a suicide. Wille zur Macht has turned into Wille zur Nacht. A night, an obscure night, has fallen over Europe. The idols of Europe are collapsing and the day is rapidly approaching when not a trace will remain of that European culture which has built cities and destroyed souls and which adored the creation while rejecting the Creator..."[390]

But it is not in the old world of Europe so much as in the new world of America that the true scale and significance of the contemporary Babylon can be appreciated. As Archpriest Lev Lebedev writes: "The concept of 'the new Babylon' is not a figurative comparison or metaphor. New York, like the whole of America, is a true *confusion* of all the languages of the world. What can't you find here! We have already spoken about the negroes. Now it is necessary to say that here there are amazingly many Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, other Asiatic nationalities, Arabs, representatives of *all* the European peoples (very many Italians), there are probably more Armenians in New York alone than in Yerevan, and more Jews, of course, than in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem; and if you take the whole of the USA, then there are far more Jews here than in the whole state of Israel. There are Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians – in short, representatives of all the peoples of the planet! The international language is English, since the Anglo-Saxons have a certain numerical preponderance, but now not so significant. In the same way all the religions of the world are represented: Christianity in every possible and impossible confession, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Shintoism, paganism, innumerable 'occult' currents, and finally, open Satanism ('the church of satan'!) and Masonry in all its rituals (rites). If we are talking about formal belonging, then in the USA the largest group is that of the Protestants of the most varied tendencies, although there are also quite a few Catholics, Orthodox and Monophysites. And if we are talking about influence on the public life of the country, then the strongest and most noticeable of all is the influence of Judaism and Masonry…

"It is known that about 80% (if it is not more than that now) of the world's gold is in the hands or under the control of people of Jewish nationality. It is also known that there are not more than 4 to 6 major bank-industrial corporations, which have concentrated into their hands the threads of the administration of the economy of the whole planet. About 90% of the mass media are also under the control of Jews and Masons. A majority of the visible, or more often – invisible, mechanisms and levers of the life of the whole of humanity are controlled by Judaeo-Masonry, which is particularly evident in the USA. The centre of this invisible or secret world government consists of the more authoritative and influential rabbis. It moved to various countries, and is now in the USA. The Jews are expecting any day the appearance of their 'Messiah', while the Masons are expecting the appearance of 'the Great Jewish King'. The number of his name is well known to us and to everyone. This number is six hundred and sixty six… the breath of the approaching

[390] Archimandrite Justin, "Humanistic and Theanthropic Culture", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 34, no. 4, July-August, 1984, pp. 42-43.

antichrist is very much felt in the USA and Western Europe, especially in France. Just one example: the entrance to the Louvre in Paris is constructed, according to an idea of F. Mitterand, in the form of a glass pyramid with 666 panes of glass.

"To the coming one whose the number of whose name is 666 will be entrusted the above-mentioned threads, mechanisms and levers of the government of the external life of humanity. The material-technical preparation for his enthronement, as we see, is complete. Fulfilled also before our eyes are the signs of the Second Glorious Coming of Christ, as they are give in the Gospel according to Matthew (24.4-39) by the Saviour Himself, right up to the **preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the whole universe as a witness to all peoples** (Matthew 24.14).[391] **It is not for (us) to know the times and periods** (Acts 1.7), not even the angels know them. But these times and periods are being more and more often pointed to – and by the Jews themselves – in proportion as the **beast** and the Second Coming come closer. Thus in 1968 the Israelite press reported that 'the Messiah has already been born and is being brought up in secret from outsiders' eyes'. This report without any commentary was repeated by the Soviet journal *Science and Religion*. It can be understood in two ways: the 'Messiah' (antichrist) was born in 1968 or he was born a little earlier, but this was proclaimed in 1968. According to Jewish laws, he must appear in the public sphere, as did Christ, at the age of 30 (spiritual maturity). Then we may see him in 1998 or even earlier (some of the Jews give the date 1993 or 1992). In one way or another, the appearance of this truly *universal* 'leader and teacher' onto the arena of world politics may take place in this 90s decade of the 20th century. 'Rehearsals' were carried out in the purely western Germany (Hitler), in the semi-Asiatic Russia (Stalin), in the purely Asiatic China (Mao) and were everywhere exceptionally successful in the sense that the population of these countries in its basic mass was completely receptive to the man-god. None of the three above-mentioned 'leaders' became universal because they were only foreshadowings of the real Antichrist, who must be 'the Great *Jewish* King'.

"There have already been appearances or rehearsals of the well-known **mark** (or seal) of the **beast - or his name, or the number of his name**, **laid on their right hand or on their foreheads** on **all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave**, so that **no one may *buy or sell* except one who has the mark** (Revelation 13.16-18). In Switzerland a gigantic computer is being built, into which the numeric figures of every dweller upon the earth must be put, in accordance with which it will be possible to known from any point on the earth what a man represents – whether he is the possessor of a definite individual number, and what his creditworthiness is, so that without any money or cheques he can carry out financial-commercial operations. They say

[391] This interpretation is not universally accepted. St. John Maximovich (+1966) said that this prophecy has *not* yet been fulfilled because **the Gospel of the Kingdom** can only be the Gospel as preached by the Orthodox Church, which has manifestly not reached the whole universe yet (V.M.).

that it is being planned that these numerical figures will be impressed in an invisible manner for the naked eye *on the forehead or on the right hand* of their possessors. This is being done supposedly in order to simplify financial operations and pass systems, to economise on time and paper.

"In the USA there already exist computerised cards with the numerical figures of their owners, so that he who has such a card can get by in any shop or restaurant without money or cheques. He gives his card to the shop assistant, and the latter puts into a computerised system and the bank account of the owner of the card is automatically debited that sum of money which he spent or consumed. They have told me (I don't know whether it's true in fact) that in one American town it has been suggested to all the inhabitants that they reject these cards and have a computerised number placed *on their forehead or right hand*, which only a special apparatus can 'read'; this apparatus is put in every commercial, post and banking point, for the mark is invisible to the eye. And everyone agreed…

"There is an interesting symbol of the Kheops pyramid on USA dollar notes. It has been as it were cut off and instead of the top there is a shining triangle with a mysterious eye inside. That this is by no means 'the all-seeing eye of God' but the eye of the antichrist, is witnessed by the inscriptions below, in Latin: 'the new order of the initiated (elect)'[392] and in English: 'The Great Seal'. Truly **it is near, at the doors** (Matthew 24.33)…

"And how did it all beginning, where did it all come from? The very first source, of course, is the fall into sin of the forefathers. Then followed Cain, who killed Abel, and then the apostate humanity before the flood. Then, after the flood – the tower of Babel, that is, the attempt to construct **a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens**, so as **to create a name for themselves**, before scattering across the earth [Genesis 11.4]. A most interesting enterprise! People… and Nimrod did not like the name given them by God. They wanted ***to create*** a name for themselves. But the only true creator (who can create in the proper sense of the word) is God. That means that what was laid down here was the same as in the first temptation from the devil-serpent: **You shall be as gods**… (Genesis 3.4). But divinity is omnipotence and blessedness. Therefore attaining 'omnipotence' and constructing for oneself here, in earthly existence, a likeness of the paradisiac 'all-blessedness'– is the idea of **the city and tower whose top is in the heavens**. The people of antiquity (by contrast with contemporary people) well knew that the material **tower** could not attain the immaterial sphere of the spiritual Heaven. So they did not construct it in order that they might thereby ascend to Paradise. (After all, they had already decided to scatter over the face of the earth.) They constructed it, as we already said at the beginning, in order to receive the *power* (energy) of the aerial demons and through these energies acquire for themselves both 'might' and 'the life of paradise' in spite of God's decree concerning fallen mankind damaged by sin. In other words, they decided to

[392] This is incorrect. The correct translation is: "The new order of the ages".

resort to the help of the devil and his angels in this apostasy and resistance to God of theirs. In the given circumstance what is interesting is the conscious organisation of a huge number of people into a single community, into a *common work* (in Latin – respublica) penetrated by one idea perceived by the 'masses'.

"It is not difficult to imagine how much knowledge was put into the grandiose construction: mathematical, engineering, architectural, astronomical, demonological knowledge, etc., and finally, social knowledge. For it was necessary to organise a huge community of men according to specialisms, sectors and teams; to found a hierarchy of leaders, master craftsmen, craftsmen, apprentices; a system of rewards and punishments, etc. The **city and tower** was a synthesis of the most varied sciences and knowledge. The latter, moreover, had to be 'pure' knowledge, that is, 'purified' from every idea of the Divine presence…, but based exclusively on the properties and regularities of things and their inter-relations, their causal links taken in isolation from God, cut off from Him… The source of this knowledge is well-known – it is the cold and graceless reason of the devil. Then at the base of all this it there had to be laid devil-worship and demon-worship in a clear or hidden form, which later manifested itself vividly in paganism. And not only in paganism!

"However, not all of humanity agreed to take part in the building of the tower. Our Russian *Tale of Burning Years* (The Chronicle of Nestor), relying on the chronicle of George Armatoll, says that righteous Heber ('from him came the Hebrews') refused to take part in the undertaking. And the Armenian and some other chronicles add that certain Japhethites also refused, because of which a war took place between them and Nimrod.

"Nevertheless, God's righteousness and truth had to be borne witness to in humanity through some **tongue** or people. The descendants of Heber were chosen to be that people (and now we understand why). In them God created the Old Testament Church based on the Law given by Moses, and on the words of the prophets.

"However, the very idea of building a city and tower with the aim of attaining, in earthly conditions, blessedness and omnipotence and that knowledge which is needed for its supposed realisation, did not perish, but was preserved in the memory of the **tongues**. After the terrible crash of the **tower** it was dangerous to preach them openly. Therefore this knowledge was carefully encapsulated and encoded in symbols and rituals as a hidden (occult) treasure, and was preserved and handed down through the systems of various 'initiations' in the Egyptian and Ancient Babylonian priestly castes, in some of the castes of India, the Far East and America, in the Pythagorean schools of Greece, in the secret societies of Constantinople, in 'Christian' Gnosticism, in Templarism, in the midst of the Troubadors, in secret courts, in heretical sects, in huge builders' organisations of free stone-masons of Gothic Europe. And everywhere that these societies acquired significant influence a

striving for *monumentalism* in building made itself vividly felt. Therefore it would not be a mistake to consider the pyramids of Egypt and America, the ziggurats of Babylon, some of the temples and pagodas of India and Asia and the Gothic cathedrals and castles as kinds of 'replays', experiments, reminiscences or models of the Biblical Babylon (**tower to the top of the heavens**). I remember that I was very struck by the inner structure of the burial chamber of the royal kurgan in Kerch (in the Crimea). The rectangular base of the chamber (the floor and the lower level of the walls) was gradually 'converted' into a circle, and then into a system of gradually diminishing circles. This is both reminiscent of the ziggurats and a graphic solution of the mathematical problem of *the squaring of the circle* – a favourite problem of the occultists of antiquity. Such chambers still exist in the Crimea, and also in many other places in the Hellenic world. What is the spiritual essence of this problem? The circle is the symbol of infinity and eternity, and in this sense it is one of the symbols of God. The square (and the polygon in general) is an image of the limit and the finite. The finite and the limited (man) is 'converted (must be converted) into the infinite and the eternal, **become like god**! The mathematical solution of this problem is in principle impossible: the square can never become a circle, the polygon can be infinitely approximated to the corresponding circle, but it can never become it. And nevertheless they stubbornly tried (and try) to solve this problem. This is very similar to the situation with 'the philosopher's stone'. The latter is linked not only (and even not so much) with chemical alchemy (the attempt to get gold by means of the analysis and then synthesis of element of various materials). There is a more important and more profound *philosophical alchemy*. The essence of its teaching is that it is necessary first to analytically reduce everything that exists (material objects, society, morality, the personality of man in general) into its constituent elements, and turn everything into chaos, for God began the creation of the world from chaos. Then it will be possible 'by a revolutionary path' to *seize* that point which is God in the act of creating the world (this is the 'philosopher's stone') and man will receive the possibility – in the place of God and in spite of Him, **as god** – to create a *new* world by the power of his own imagination, synthesising in an arbitrary manner the elements of dissolved being. The alchemists were right in thinking that this 'point' exists. Moreover, it is not outside man, but in man himself, insofar as man is created **according to the image and likeness** of God and has in himself His mysterious presence. But it is in principle impossible to seize this point 'in a revolutionary manner' and in spite of God! It will *become* the heritage of man only in the Kingdom of Heaven, in the **new earth** under the **new heaven** (Revelation 21.1), the path into which lies in Christ and not through pride (the condition of the devil), but through extreme humility and love for God and people (the condition of the Lord Jesus Christ).

"All these occult 'wisdoms' (we shall call them Babylonian secret knowledge) were received by a certain élite of the Jewish rabbinate not anywhere, but precisely in the ancient *Babylonian* kingdom, where the Jewish people had been almost completely resettled long before the First Coming of Christ. Thus by the time of this Coming the Babylonian secret knowledge and,

naturally, the devil-worship linked with it had succeeded in becoming widespread and strong amidst the Jews, which led in the end to the rejection of the true Messiah – Jesus Christ in the descendants of Heber in the flesh (but not in the spirit) and to the crucifixion of Christ. That is why to the Jews who did not want to believe in Him and who said that **our father is God**, Christ objected, saying: **Your father is the devil and want to fulfil the desires of your father** (John 8.44). On the lips of the Saviour this was not 'a figurative expression' whose aim was to offend those quarrelling with him; it was a threatening exposure of their hidden worship of the devil as god in the spiritual secrets of their society. The fact of the matter was that in the Babylonian (Chaldean), and then in the Hebrew Cabbala there is present not only pantheism, but also, at a deeper level, religio-philosophical dualism – faith in TWO gods. One god is the God of Scripture, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, while the other is he whom Scripture calls the devil, the morning star, the fallen archangel, satan, the ancient serpent (in later literature sometimes – Lucifer, that is, 'light-bearer'). Between these two gods a struggle is being waged. In the first period of history the God of Scripture prevailed, but in the second period the second 'god' – Lucifer – must conquer. This is symbolised by the six-pointed star from two equal triangles and constitutes the secret of the Talmud and the other secret teachings. The victory of the second god Lucifer must be accomplished through a special person (super-person) endowed by the devil with exceptional powers and abilities. This person is the Great Jewish King, that 'messiah' whom the Jews are still waiting for (not having received the true Messiah, Jesus Christ) and who is also called the Antichrist. The number of the man's name is six hundred and sixty six. In order that this person may acquire real power over the whole world, this world must be *united* into a certain single structure ruled from the centre, which is in the hands of the Jews. But how to attract to such a work the non-Jews, non-Hebrews (the goyim, as the Jews call people of other nationalities)? With this aim a purely spiritual and political (no longer constructional) movement of 'free stonemasons' or 'masons'.. was created. Here, in the Masonic lodges, the Jews, or more exactly the Talmudic Judaists, attained freedom, equality and 'brotherhood' with representatives of other (any other) nationalities, and also attracted the latter to their work, which became a 'common work' (in Latin, literally res-publica).

"From this one can understand why all revolutions without exception have led to the destruction of lawful authorities and orders and to the victory of republican systems, having as their detonator and main driving force Jewry and Masonry. Moreover, these revolutions were also the first social experiments in the destruction of life, and its conversion into chaos so as 'to build a new world' where 'he who was nothing will become everything'. Besides, the envy of nobodies who have become, as it seems to them, 'everything', has been used in all revolutions for the mass destruction of dissidents, who are incapable of thinking 'as is necessary', or are capable of thinking. Thus they have striven to convert the remaining 'masses' into obedient. 'conscious' slaves of the revolutionary leaders.

"Since the end of the 18th century Masonry has focussed in itself the Babylonian secret knowledge of the preceding ages and gradually spread its influence over the whole of the social-political and economic life of contemporary mankind, insofar as in almost all (although not in all) peoples the indicated secret knowledge and system initiation has been preserved, as we have seen, since the times of the Babylonian **tower to the top of the heavens**. It is not surprising, therefore, that in their purely architectural-constructional and other works the contemporary Babylonians have constantly been drawn towards monumentalism, towards height (the skyscrapers, the Eiffel tower, other tall buildings, flights every higher and higher, right into space…). Once in the 1970s a Soviet astronaut and a scientific academic were speaking on television. With one voice they said that the significance of flights into space did not consist in their being able to bring benefit to people on earth, but in the fact that they were '*the self-affirmation of mankind*'; 'man as the master of the earth is now entering into possession of the whole universe' (I remember these expressions verbatim). There they are in an open form – pride and the desire **to become as gods**…

"In this way that there appeared in history a kind of *Antichurch*, or **church of the evil-doers**, as the king and prophet David calls it. It is interesting that the descendants of righteous Heber attached themselves to it and entered it! And not simply entered, but became its main core, the basis of the power of the antichurch. If Heber received grace from God for his refusal to take part in the construction of the **city and tower to the top of the heavens** and for this was counted worthy of the fact that it was in his posterity that the coming of the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world, was prepared, then after His rejection in this same posterity, none other than the Jews became the most important master-builders of the new, contemporary tower of Babel, on the spiritual-historical peak of which is expected the coming and temporary enthronement of the false messiah, the destroyer of the world – the Antichrist.

"Now it is completely understandable why in the Revelation of John the Theologian it should be called ***Babylon the Great*, mother of harlots and abominations of the earth**, and appears in the form of a **woman** sitting **on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy** (Revelation 17.3-6). This is the universal **church of the evil-doers**, the base of which is the former Old Testament Church of ancient Israel, which was betrothed to God but which betrayed Him in adultery with the devil.

"This adultery is displayed, in essence, in the same features as at the construction of the ancient tower of Babel. Artificially and deliberately cut off from any, even hypothetical ideas of the Divine presence, cold knowing, whose methods are analysis, which cuts up the living and integral into its constituent elements and thereby *kills* it, and synthesis, which is unable to construct out of dead elements anything other than a corpse – a soulless and harmful *syntheticism* and, finally, *rationalism* (maximum profit for minimum outlay). The latter inevitably presupposes this very profit as being crystallised in GOLD, the most important aim of production, the sole 'god' of every

entrepreneurship and economics. There has always existed in mankind, as a psychological phenomenon, the desire for enrichment, there has always been trade and exchange, wars and looting, but there has not been a thousand years of capitalism and scientific-technical progress! Were people so stupid, so undeveloped? No! Beautiful palaces and temples, pyramids and Chinese walls have been constructed, Pythagoras and Archimedes have worked, arts and crafts have attained unheard-of subtlety, while there was no capitalism or 'progress'. The unique perfections that arose in one or another sphere of labour can in no way be called 'progress' in the contemporary understanding. What are we talking about? We are talking about the fact that in all peoples there existed a *sacral* perception of labour and its technology. Labour was a divine action, technological methods and processes were almost sacred rituals; they corresponded to the mode of action of the higher powers and served them. Therefore every substantive change in technology with the aim of gaining greater profit was evaluated as a crime of a religious-moral nature. Only a *religion* that would have the amassment of gold and riches as one of its commandments, or religious virtues, could break this perception. Talmudic Judaism became this religion. Not in vain did the usury of antiquity become the most typical occupation of the Jewish diaspora. Having amassed much gold, the Israelites were nevertheless unable to 'spread their wings' with it, since in practically all countries and peoples they were an element that was foreign and severely restricted in its rights. The European revolutions, beginning with the Dutch and English revolutions in the 17th century and ending with the French and Russian revolutions, broke this blockade, guaranteeing the Jews 'freedom, equality and brotherhood' with the non-Jews not only within the limits of the Masonic movement, but also in society in general. With their help they became the driving mechanism for the lust for gold and its worship in all the European peoples, who by that time had also populated the New World. Thus began accursed capitalism and scientific-technical progress. At its basis was the usurers' rate of interest. And what is that in essence? I give you 100 units of something, and you are obliged to return, for example, 120 or 130. This is legalised theft, legal robbery. However, everything is based on this rate of interest: production with its 'surplus value', banking, credit operations. The all-powerful bank with its all-powerful Rate of Interest stands at the centre of the whole civilisation of the universe, which we may therefore call, without any exaggeration or strain, *the robber civilisation*.

"All this is particularly clearly evident if we rise in thought as it were to the tope of the Empire State Building of the contemporary Tower of Babel. From there we can also see that gold is the "god" not only for the profane. For the 'brothers'-stonemasons initiated into the higher steps (degrees) it is only a means of gaining control of the external life of the world so as to hand it into the possession of 'the Great Architect of the Universe' – Lucifer. It is precisely in this direction that everything that makes people 'whirl' in today's Babylon moves. In the USA it is simply more evident that in other countries, but the very same is taking place in them, too.

"Into this mad ziggurat of the **tower to the top of the heavens** 'Christianity' is also being drawn – Christianity that has apostasised or is apostasising from the faithful, Orthodox way, from **the Way, the Truth and the Life**, which is Jesus Christ. The churches in the 'ecumenical' movement which used to be Orthodox only recently are merging and fraternising with heresy and even with non-Christian religions. The idea is to synthesise the analytically disjoined elements of various faiths into a single (synthetic) religion and church, into 'the religion of the future'… Willingly and with firm strides the Moscow Patriarchate is also walking in this movement and is trying to draw the Russian flock with it, cunningly pointing to the example of other local churches, such as Constantinople or the American Autocephaly. The National Council of Churches of the USA was recently for the first time headed by an 'Orthodox' priest from this Autocephalous church, at the same time that one significant Greek community *left* this council because it had decided to receive into its membership a 'church' of homosexuals and allow the ordination in certain Protestant 'churches' of women, and also sodomites and lesbians to the priesthood (and even now to the episcopate)… A case that tells us much about 'the religion of the future'. The rapid multiplication of all kinds of sexual perversions in the contemporary Babylon is not coincidental: this is a return to Sodom, which was destroyed by fire. But the present Babylon will be destroyed *by fire*, as the Apostolic Scriptures say. However, it has already begun to burn, as it were. As always and in everything, the devil, Lucifer, is deceiving the unfortunate Babylonians and the no less unfortunate Jews, of whom it is said that **they say that they are Jews, and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan** (Revelation 2.9). He is not god, but a creation of God, a fallen archangel, and nothing inspired by him will stand, but will be destroyed at the Second Glorious Coming of Christ. And he is already beginning to be destroyed. Contemporary industry is doomed to suffer a universal ecological catastrophe. The Masons themselves are already frightened, they fear suffocation. There have appeared the 'Growth Limits' of the club of Rome, a club of energy-producers is planning a similar book. But late. Too late. Babylon has begun to devour itself with unstoppable rapidity."[393]

[393] Lebedev, op. cit.

8. The Triumph of Orthodoxy: (ii) the Liberation of the East

In chapter 19, the celebration over the destruction of Babylon, the pseudo-religion and corrupt culture of the apostate West, merges into the celebration of the triumph of the Church, the true faith and spiritual culture of the Orthodox East.

19.1-10. And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are His judgements: for He hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of many thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

"**Alleluia**, according to the explanation of St. Andrew of Caesarea, signifies Divine glorification; **Amen** - truly, may it be so. This, he says, is sung to God by the angelic powers together with the men who are equal to the angels 'three times', because of the Three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, of the one God, Who has avenged the blood of His servants at the hands of Babylon, doing good by the punishment of her inhabitants and cutting off sin. **Alleluia**, from the Hebrew 'Hallemu Jah', means literally: 'Praise God'. **And her smoke rose up unto the ages of ages**. This means that the wrath of God that strikes Babylon the harlot will continue for ever. **Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come.** The reason for rejoicing lies in the fact that the time for the celebration of the marriage of the Lamb has come. By 'marriage' or 'marriage feast' is meant in a general sense the rejoicing of the Church. By the Bridegroom of the Church is meant the Lamb - the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of His mystical Body; by the Bride and Wife of the Lamb is meant the Church (cf. Ephesians 5.25). The marriage itself signifies the close union of the Lord Jesus Christ with the Church, sealed by faithfulness on both sides to an established covenant, as by mutual agreement (cf. Hosea 2.18-20). The marriage feast signifies the enjoyment of the fullness of the grace of God, which by the power of the redeeming merits of Christ

will be given in abundance to all true members of the Church of Christ, to rejoice and make glad in all their ineffable good things. **And His wife made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white.** 'That the Church is arrayed in linen signifies her radiance in good works, her subtlety of understanding and her loftiness in meditation and contemplation, for in these consists Divine righteousness.' (St. Andrew of Caesarea). **Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.** 'The supper of Christ,' explains St. Andrew, 'is the triumph of the saved, and the corresponding joy which the blessed receive when they enter into the eternal bridal chamber with the Holy Bridegroom of pure souls: **Unlying is He Who promised**. Just as many are the good things of the age to come, surpassing all thought, so various are the names by which they are called. They are sometimes called the *Heavenly Kingdom* because of its glory and honour, sometimes *Paradise* because of the abundance of delights at its table, sometimes the *Bridal Chamber* and *Marriage*, not only by reason of its unending joy, but also because of the pure, true and ineffable union of God with His servants - a union as far surpassing the bodily union of one with another as light is distinguished from darkness and myrrh from stench.' The angel before whom St. John wished to bow down forbade him to do this, saying: **I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.** The meaning of these words is this: Do not bow down before me, for I am only your fellow-servant. The same Holy Spirit Who speaks and acts through the apostles, in particular St. John, who preaches and witnesses about Jesus, also speaks through the angels, as through those who are similarly messengers of God. It is as if the angel says: 'Your dignity is the same as mine; you, being endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, witness concerning the words and death of Jesus Christ, while I, having received from the same Holy Spirit the revelation of future events, inform you and the Church about it. In other words, the spirit of witness for Christ is also the spirit of prophecy, that is, they have the same dignity and the same aim.' St. Andrew of Caesarea here remarks on the humility of the angels, who do not assume the Divine Glory for themselves, as do the evil demons, but ascribe it to the Master." (Archbishop Averky)

19.11-12. And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war. His eyes were as flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns; and He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself.

In this chapter, as the Triumph of the Church approaches, images from previous visions are recalled: the secret names from the first vision, the twenty-four elders and four living creatures from the second vision, and the rider on the white horse from the second vision.

The rider on the white horse in the second vision (the first seal) symbolised, according to the present interpretation, the triumphs of the Orthodox armies

in the First World War. But these triumphs turned to defeat and then the fall of Orthodoxy itself during the Russian revolution. Now, however, as the revolution is in turn defeated, the figure on the white horse returns, signifying the revival of the Orthodox empire.

"The white horse signifies the radiance of the saints, sitting on whom He will judge the peoples, emitting from His flaming, fiery eyes, that is, from His all-seeing power, a fiery flame, which, however, does not burn the righteous but enlightens them, while, on the contrary, it burns the sinners without enlightening them." (St. Andrew of Caesarea).

Christ is called **Faithful and True** because He is here coming to rescue His Church in accordance with His promise: **The gates of hell shall not prevail against her** (Matthew 16.18). He makes war, because He is not only the all-merciful Lover of mankind but also the all righteous Judge of Whom it is written: **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God** (Hebrews 10.31). For **I form the light, and I create darkness: I make peace, and I create evil: I the Lord do all these things** (Isaiah 45.7).

Not that God is in any way the author of moral and spiritual evil: all real evil is the responsibility of men and demons only. But He creates, or permits to take place, wars, earthquakes, epidemics and other catastrophes which are deemed evil in men's eyes, but which are in fact the instrument of an all-holy purpose, either the glorification of the righteous (Job, the martyrs, Christ Himself), or the chastisement and correction of those who are in error but who have the will to be saved (Jonah in the belly of the whale, the paralytic in John 5), or the just recompense and punishment of those who are incorrigibly impenitent (Ahab, Herod, the sinners at the Last Judgement). For **all things work together for good for those who love God** (Romans 8.28). But for those who do not love God, they are for evil - not through the fault of God, but because of their own iniquity.

In righteousness He doth judge and make war. For **righteous art Thou, O Lord, and upright are Thy judgements** (Ps. 118.137).

And **who shall say, What hast Thou done? Or who shall withstand His judgement? Or who shall accuse Thee for the nations that perish, whom Thou hast made? Or who shall come to stand against Thee, to be revenged for the unrighteous men?** (Wisdom of Solomon 12.12).

"**And He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself.** The fact that His name is unknown points to the unattainability of His Divine essence. Further on, in verse 13, He is called **the Word of God**. This name is actually unattainable for men, for it refers to the essence and origin of the Divine nature of Jesus Christ, which no mortal can attain. That is why in the Old Testament it is called wonderful (Judges 13.18; Isaiah 9.6; Proverbs 30.4)." (Archbishop Averky)

19.13. And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called the Word of God.

"The vesture of God the Word was His all-pure and incorruptible Flesh, dyed in His Blood at the time of His voluntary sufferings." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

That it is not man, but God Himself that will bring the war to an end in a miraculous manner is indicated in other prophecies. Thus the anonymous Greek prophet of 1053 says that the war will be brought to an end "by an Angel of Christ God".

19.14. And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

"These are the heavenly powers distinguished by the subtlety of their nature, the loftiness of their understanding and the radiance of their good deeds and honoured with an indissolubly close union with Christ." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

19.15. And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

"This sword of Christ is in this case not so much that of a teacher (cf. 1.16) as that of a king, accomplishing His judgements with an iron rod - this expression is taken from Psalm 2.9, Isaiah 63.4-5, and is explained in Revelation 2.27, 12.5." (Archbishop Averky)

19.16. And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

"This name, witnessing to the Divine dignity of its bearer, was written on the thigh, that is, on the royal cloak near that part of the body from which, according to the custom of eastern peoples, hung a sword on a belt." (Archbishop Averky)

19.17-21. And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him that sat on the horse, and against His army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that had worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword

of Him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of His mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.

The Prophet Isaiah says: **And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.** (66.24).

And the Prophet Ezekiel says: **Thou** [Gog] **shalt fall upon the mountains of Israel, thou, and all thy bands, and the people that is with thee: I will give thee unto the ravenous birds of every sort, and to the beasts of the field to be devoured.** (39.4).

St. Ephraim the Syrian comments on this passage from Ezekiel: "Then Divine Justice will call upon Michael, the leader of the hosts, and send him to destroy their camps; as the camps of Sennacherib. At the command, and with his mighty and terrible sword, the angel shall go forth and destroy their armies in the twinkling of an eye, and in the same moment the Divine Justice, thundering from on high, shall destroy their camps with rocks of fire. Their slain shall lie upon the ground, innumerable as the sands. Beasts and men shall die, and the whole camp shall perish, and flame shall be let loose against the sea and against the islands. The bow of Gog, the evil king, shall fall from his left hand, and the arrows from his right hand (Ezekiel 39.3); and his camp shall be wholly destroyed. Then the Lord from His glorious heaven shall set up His peace. And the kingdom of the Romans [the Orthodox Christian Empire] shall rise in place of this latter people, and establish its dominion upon the earth, even to the ends, and there shall be no one who will resist it..."[394]

Thus will perish both the beast in his seventh incarnation, Soviet Russia (of which the present Russian "sovereign democracy", ruled as it is by ex-communists, is simply the continuation in another form), and its false prophet, atheist, materialist pseudo-science. And the demons will gather a rich harvest of souls. As St. John of Kronstadt saw at the end of his vision of the collective Antichrist: "He waved his hands and fell, his crown fell from his head and rolled in the dust, and millions of birds flew and pecked at the bodies of the Antichrist."[395]

The sword may be understood in a physical sense, but also in a spiritual sense, as the word of God, which is **quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart** (Hebrews 4.12). And this is much more frightening. For

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[394] St. Ephraim, *Works*, Edition Lamy, III, col. 188, *Sermon* II on Gog and Magog and the consummation of the world; translated by M.F. Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, London: Longmans, 1963, vol. 4, p. 355.

[395] St. John of Kronstadt, in Fomin, op. cit., p. 141.

the physical sword can only separate the soul from the body without harming the soul in its relationship to the Spirit of God. But the word of God, delivered in righteous judgement upon sinners, cuts off the soul from communion with God and delivers the whole man to eternal punishment. As the Lord said: **Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell** (Matthew 10.28).

"There are two deaths. One is the separation of the soul from the body, and the other - being thrust into gehenna. Applying this to those on the side of the Antichrist, we have good reason to believe that by the sword or the command of God the first, physical death will be administered, after which will follow the second… They will be participants in the second death - eternal torments." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

9. The Triumph of Orthodoxy: (iii) The Millenium and the Judgement

The twentieth chapter of the Apocalypse presents one of the most difficult problems of Biblical exegesis. In the early centuries of Christianity certain heretics, such as Cerinthus, interpreted the thousand-year reign of Christ referred to in verses 2 to 7 in an over-literal, sensual, Judaizing sense. They argued, linking this chapter with certain Messianic passages from the Old Testament, that after the defeat of the Antichrist Christ would come in a visible form to earth and reign with His saints from Jerusalem; that this period would last for literally a thousand years until the Last Judgement; that the bodies of the saints would be resurrected to enjoy all the pleasures of this earthly life; and that the Jews and their Mosaic law, with its sabbaths and circumcisions, would have dominion over all the nations of the earth.

Variations of this error, called "chiliasm" or "millenarianism", are to be found in every historical epoch. In modern times the creation of the State of Israel has stimulated its reappearance in many sects, notably the Jehovah's Witnesses. Some decades ago Fr. Seraphim Rose wrote: "The careful observer of the contemporary religious scene - especially in America, where the most popular religious currents have originated for over a century - cannot fail to notice a very decided air of chiliastic expectation. And this is not only true of 'charismatic' circles, but even of the traditionalist or fundamentalist circles that have rejected the 'charismatic revival'. Thus, many traditionalist Roman Catholics believe in the coming of a chiliastic 'Age of Mary' before the end of the world, and this is only one variant on the more widespread Latin error of trying to 'sanctify the world', or, as Archbishop Thomas Connolly of Seattle expressed it fifteen years ago, 'transforming the modern world into the Kingdom of God in preparation for His return.' Protestant evangelists such as Billy Graham, in their mistaken private interpretation of the Apocalypse, await the 'millenium' when 'Christ' will reign on earth. Other evangelists in Israel find that their millenarian interpretation of the 'Messiah' is just what is need to 'prepare' the Jews for his coming..."[396]

However, "chiliasm" has never been precisely defined; and there were some Orthodox fathers and saints who, while avoiding the errors of the extreme Judaizers, interpreted the millenium in a fairly literal way. Thus St. Justin the Martyr writes: "There was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgement of all men would likewise take place."[397] While admitting that "many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise," he declared that he and others "who are right-minded Christians on all points are assured that there will be a resurrection of

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[396] Rose, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1990, pp. 212-213.
[397] St. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 81.

the dead, and 1000 years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned and enlarged as the Prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah and others declare."[398]

Several other fathers of the early centuries, such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Methodius of Olympus, are also classified as chiliasts, although they usually interpreted the figure of "1000 years" in a symbolical sense. These teachers were fighting especially against the heresy of Gnosticism, which rejected the flesh as evil and tended to interpret the resurrection of the dead in a purely spiritual sense. Irenaeus, in particular, inveighed against the over-allegorical interpretation of the prophecies. Lactantius, the tutor to the Emperor Constantine's son, was also a chiliast. Thereafter, however, a strong reaction set in against the teaching, led by the Church historian Eusebius.[399]

At the Second Ecumenical Council in 381, the Church introduced the phrase: "Whose Kingdom shall have no end" into the Symbol of the Faith, without, however, formally anathematising chiliasm. In fact, according to some writers, the introduction of this phrase into the Symbol may not have been directed against chiliasm at all, or only against its cruder, Jewish variants.[400] So it is possible that the less extreme, more spiritual forms of the teaching were permitted. For even Blessed Jerome, who, with Blessed Augustine, was the foremost enemy of the teaching, while mocking the chiliasts as "our half-Jews"[401], in other places speaks of them with more respect, as holding views "which, although we may not hold, we cannot condemn, because many ecclesiastical men and martyrs have taught the same".[402] It is unlikely that he would have said this if the views of Saints Irenaeus, Hippolytus and others had been formally anathematized at the Second Ecumenical Council. Even Blessed Augustine, the real founder of the purely allegorical interpretation that holds sway at the present time, admits that there are "tolerable" kinds of chiliasm – that is, those kinds in which the delights of the millennium are "of a spiritual kind".[403]

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[398] St. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 80.

[399] So strongly opposed to it was he that he described one of the early chiliast writers, St. Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, whom Irenaeus accepted as having heard the Apostle John himself, as "a man of very little intelligence" (Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 3, 39, 11).

[400] This is the view of Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, who writes (personal communication, 21 January, 1997): "It seems more probable that it was directed against the theories of Marcellus of Ancyra (who was not a millenarian); Marcellus and his followers are mentioned in Canon One of the 381 Council. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, takes the view that the clause in question is aimed against Marcellus. Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*, says nothing about any condemnation of millenarianism in 381." V. Kapitanchuk denies that chiliasm was condemned by the Councils ("Khiliazm ne osuzhden Soborami", http://www.apocalyptism.ru/Chiliasm-Kapitanchuk.htm (in Russian)).

[401] St. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* 60.1, 66.20.

[402] St. Jerome, *Commentary on Jeremiah* 19.10.

[403] "Those who, because of the passage in this book, have suspected that the first resurrection is future and bodily, have been influenced, especially, among other things, by the number of a thousand years, to suppose that it were fitting that among the saints there should be during that time a kind of sabbatism, a holy vacation as it were after the labours of the six thousand years since man was created... This opinion would be somewhat tolerable, if the delights of that sabbath to be enjoyed by the saints were, through the presence of the Lord, of a spiritual

From the fifth century, under the influence of Jerome and Augustine[404], a purely spiritual conception of the millenium became prevalent, according to which the thousand-year reign of Christ represents the whole of Christian history between the First and Second Comings of Christ but excluding the reign of the Antichrist. For, as Augustine wrote, St. John "intended his mention of 'a thousand years' to stand for the whole span of our world's history. How else, after all, is one to convey an immensity of time except by deploying a perfectly round number?"[405] Thus St. Andrew of Caesarea writes: "The number **thousand** signifies either many years or a perfect number. For it could signify many years in order that the Gospel should be preached throughout the world, and that the seeds of piety should be implanted in it; and it could signify a perfect number because in them we are called to abandon the childhood life under the law and come to the perfect man, the measure of the age of the fulfilment of Christ. And so the **thousand years** is the time from the incarnation of the Lord to the coming of the Antichrist, the time in the course of which the Gospel will be preached."

Similarly, Fr. Seraphim Rose understands the millennium in an Augustinian sense as "*now*; the life of grace in the Orthodox Church for the whole 'thousand years' between the First Coming of Christ and the time of Antichrist."[406] This has become the dominant interpretation in recent times. However, this interpretation is open to certain powerful objections; and below a third view is expounded, which takes a middle course between the more literal views of the second and third century Fathers, and the purely allegorical views of Jerome and Augustine. This view is presented very tentatively (as is the whole of the present interpretation of the Apocalypse); but it has the advantage of escaping the extremes of over-literalism and Judaism, on the one hand, and excessive allegorism, on the other.

20.1-3. And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed for a short time.

This image is immediately reminiscent of Revelation 9.1-3, where demons are released from the abyss to let loose (according to our interpretation) the Third World War, and Revelation 10.1, where an angel (the Archangel

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kind. For we too were at one time of this opinion." (*The City of God*, 20, 7, 1; in William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Fathers*, Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1970, vol. III, p. 104).

[404] And even earlier than these, of the Donatist Bishop Tychonius, who died towards the end of the fourth century and very probably influenced St. Augustine. See Fr. Nicholas Kim, *The Thousand-Year Kingdom*, St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2003, pp. 217-220 (in Russian).

[405] St. Augustine, *The City of God,* 20.7.

[406] Rose, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, op. cit., pp. 214-215.

Michael?) descends from heaven to restore peace to the world. In view of the similarity of the imagery, it would be reasonable to suppose that the seer is here witnessing the same events as in the earlier vision. If so, then there is a chronologically continuous transition between Revelation 19 and 20, just as there was between chapters 9 and 10, and not the abrupt break in the narrative that is postulated by the Augustinian interpretation. This transition is that between the terrible carnage of the Third World War, which was incited by the devil but in which Christ emerges as the Victor, and the period of peace afterwards, in which demonic activity is suppressed, at least temporarily. The nations are undeceived and come to the Faith of Christ for a period denoted symbolically as **a thousand years**, at the end of which the demons are again let loose to prepare the way for the Antichrist in his final form.

It should be noted, too, that whereas the beast and the false prophet are cast into the fire at the end of chapter 19, it is not until a chapter later, *after* the millenium, that we read that ***the devil*** **was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are** (20.10). This suggests that the punishment of the beast and the false prophet does not represent a full close or *last* judgement, but a *penultimate* judgement preceding that of the devil himself at the end of time.

Our hypothesis is that chapter 19 describes the defeat of the beast in his penultimate incarnation, as the seventh head, or *collective* Antichrist, while the end of chapter 20 represents the destruction of the *personal* Antichrist (here we agree with the Augustinians), followed by that of the devil at the very end of time.[407]

According to the Augustinian interpretation, Satan's **binding for a thousand years** represents his defeat by the Lord on the Cross, while his **deceiving the nations no more** signifies the whole history of the Church before the reign of the Antichrist. But is it reasonable to suppose that Satan has had so little success since the Coming of Christ that **the nations were deceived no more**? Is it not rather the case that most of the nations have been deceived for most of the time, and especially in the twentieth century? Christ bound the devil in hades in the sense that He made a way for those who believe in Him to escape the devil's snares and ascend without hindrance through the demonic toll-houses and into the Kingdom of Heaven after death. But at no time has the majority of mankind accepted His redemption; the nations have remained deceived.

As Fr. Nicholas Kim writes (describing, not his own, but our point of view): "To portray the position of Satan in the contemporary world as the position of a prisoner, locked up in the abyss and unable seriously to 'deceive the nations' in any way for a period of a thousand years… is not to reckon with the facts

[407] Perhaps forty-five days later, as seems to be suggested by Daniel 12.11-12. See the commentary on Revelation 11.14 above.

as they are. Moreover, such an understanding presupposes an extremely allegorical interpretation both of this and of other places in the Holy Scriptures that talk about the activity of Satan in general and in our age in particular. And so, if Satan is continuing to deceive the nations today, as is evident from the Holy Scriptures and the situation of affairs in the world, this means that at the present time he is not 'bound' in the abyss, and the **thousand years** mentioned in 20.2 is not taking place now, but will do in the future."[408]

Archbishop Averky suggests that the thousand years represents "the victory of the Church over paganism and the establishment of the Church on earth". This agrees with St. Andrew of Caesarea's interpretation that the binding of Satan signifies "the extermination of idolatry and the destruction of the idolaters' temples and the drying up of the blood on the altars, and the knowledge and fulfilment of the will of God throughout the world." It would suggest that the period from Constantine the Great to Tsar-Martyr Nicholas II is meant, from about 312 to 1917.[409]

And yet even in this period, and even confining the discussion to Europe and the Middle East alone, heresies such as Islam, Monophysitism, Papism and Protestantism have held sway over very large areas for long periods of time. Constantine's victory in the fourth century opened the way for the Christianization of the Mediterranean basin only; it may even be said to foreshadow the enlightening of the nations worldwide. But it cannot be said to constitute that enlightenment itself; for the majority of the nations have remained stubbornly unenlightened.

It would be most natural to interpret the phrase: **he should deceive the nations no more** to mean a more universal defeat of paganism and heresy than during the time of Constantine, a triumph of good over evil such as cannot be said to have taken place yet. This is the victory which, as so many prophets have foretold, will take place at the end of the Third World War, and which will be followed by the enlightenment of most of the nations with the light of the Orthodox Faith. It is the victory which the Lord Himself prophesied when He said: **This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come** (Matthew 24.14).

For who can say that the Orthodox Gospel – and it is certainly the Orthodox Gospel, and not the Catholic or Protestant or Ecumenist "Gospel" that is here meant, according to St. John Maximovich - has been preached throughout the whole world? It is impossible to say this when we consider that by far the largest nations on the planet, the Chinese and the Indians, not to mention the whole of South-East Asia, large parts of Africa and South

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[408] Bishop Peter of Tomsk interprets the thousand years to mean simply "a continuous period of time" (Kim, op. cit., p. 69).

[409] Bishop Peter, *Explanation of the Apocalypse*, Tomsk, 1885; in Barsov, op. cit., p. 426.

America, have hardly been touched by it. Even heretical Christians constitute small minorities in these countries. And yet the fact that the very first martyrs of the twentieth century were 222 Chinese Orthodox from the Russian Spiritual Mission in Peking, who suffered martyrdom for Christ at the hands of the Boxers in 1900[410], may point to the fact that this prophecy of the Lord is soon to be fulfilled…

And why is this triumph said to last for a thousand years? One suggestion is that this is the period in which **the fullness of the Gentiles** (Romans 11.25) comes in, which, coinciding as it does with the conversion of the Jews to Christ, sees the Church coming to her numerical fullness. For, on the one hand, the number one thousand signifies *fullness*[411], and on the other the Church is often represented as a *kingdom,* the Kingdom of God Whose King is Christ.[412] As St. Andrew of Caesarea writes: "The full number depicts abundance and perfection in the bringing forth of fruits. In the same way here the **thousand years** depicts the completed bringing forth of the fruits of faith."

Fully compatible with this idea is the further idea that the 1000-year Kingdom is the period in which the Kingdom of God on earth, that is, the Church, comes to her fullness not only in the numerical sense, but also in the revealing of the full depth of her doctrinal teaching on herself, that is, her ecclesiology. As Fr. Nicholas Kim puts it, "the 1000-year Kingdom is… the discovery of the fundamental principles of the faith of the Church, her self-identification as the economical Kingdom of Christ, as the Body of Christ, the witness of the Christology and ecclesiology of the apostolic era."[413] For since, according to our hypothesis, the period immediately preceding the millennium is *the present age*, a period distinguished above all by arguments over *the nature of the Church,* it follows that the millennium itself will be the period in which these arguments are finally resolved (at the Eighth Ecumenical Council), when the Church will succeed in adding to the Christological and Trinitarian and Pneumatological definitions she has already worked out in the first millennium of Christian history) new definitions (and anathematizations) on the nature of the Church herself as the Body of Christ and only Ark of salvation.

Bishop Peter of Tomsk writes: "Some understand by the beast the pagan Roman Empire, and count the thousand years as beginning from the time of Constantine the Great and until the end of the 13th century, when the Turkish empire was founded, and consider the Turks to be Gog and Magog. But others, while understanding by the beast the mysterious, antichristian Roman Empire, refer the thousand years to a time of the peaceful flourishing of the

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[410] "The First Chinese Orthodox Martyrs", *Chinese Herald*, June, 1935 (in Russian); *Orthodox Life*, vol. 29, N 1, January-February, 1979, pp. 14-18; *The True Vine,* n 8, Winter, 1991, pp. 42-51.
[411] See Kim, op. cit., pp. 164-165.
[412] St. Augustine writes: "At the present time, too, the Church is the Kingdom of Christ and the Heavenly Kingdom. Therefore also at the present time the saints reign with Him" (*On the City of God;* quoted in Kim, op. cit., p. 187).
[413] Kim, op. cit., p. 196.

Church, which God has ordained for her on earth after the destruction of this empire hostile to her, and which had not yet come into being. This prophecy is closely linked with the previous one, which speaks of the destruction of the beast. This opinion is confirmed by: (1) the connection of speech. In the previous prophecy (ch. 19) it is said that after the destruction of the kingdom of the beast, hosts of saints and martyrs in their doxologies offered to God for His great goodness given to the Church, express the reason for their joy as (a) the fact that God has entered into His kingdom, that is, the kingdom of Christ (v. 6); and (b) the fact that the time for the celebration of the wedding of the Lamb has come and the bride has prepared herself (v. 7). Since this is said only briefly there, the Holy Spirit wanted in this same order to explain it in more detail in the following prophecy, so that people should clearly know what happiness there will be for the Church after the destruction of the beast. The first happiness, that is, reign of Christ God, is revealed in the 20th chapter, in which it is said that after the destruction of the kingdom of the beast Jesus Christ will reign with the saints and martyrs sitting on thrones (v. 3). The last, that is, the celebration of the wedding of the Lamb is depicted in chapters 21 and 22. This is the connection of this prophecy with the preceding one. But if this prophecy about the thousand years refers to a previous time and is to be considered as inserted here, then the connection and order of the prophecies contained in chapters 19, 20, 21 and 22 is destroyed. (2) In this same prophecy it is clearly presupposed that the empire of the beast has already appeared in the world and has been destroyed. Thus in verse 4 it is said that the thrones were set, and on them sat to whom judgement was given, and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years. In verse 10 it is said that Satan, who had deceived Gog and Magog, was cast into the fiery lake where the beast and the false prophet had already been finally cast, and in which they already were during the time when God determined that Gog and Magog should be judged and punished. But Gog and Magog will appear immediately after the passing of the thousand years and will perish. Besides, the kingdom of the beast and the glorious kingdom of Christ – which must spread throughout the world among all peoples, Satan being no longer able to deceive them with a false religion or persecute the confessors of the truth, - cannot coexist at the same time. Consequently, the thousand-year reign of Christ with the saints will be in the last times, after the destruction of the kingdom of the beast or antichristianity, when all the Jews and Gentiles will be united to the Church of Christ, which at that time will be cleansed from all errors, superstitions, deceptions and the crude vices of carnal people, which before that had never been seen. For Christ does not reign everywhere when there sit on the thrones not only those who confess His name only outwardly, but also pagans. The Kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of righteousness, truth, piety, love and peace with an abundance of spiritual goods and gifts, triumph over Satan, over the spirit of the proud, luxurious, corrupt world, and over all the enemies that oppose this kingdom. Where this is, there Christ reigns. But when little of this is revealed in the Church, then Christ does not reign in complete glory. When in the rulers of the Church we note: pride, worldly splendour, luxuriousness, a worldly spirit, the love of power, a passion for predominance, the love of glory, avarice, envy, jealousy, and, proceeding

from these, quarrels, arguments, temptations, impurity of life and pandering to the vices of worldly people; when the Church groans under the tyranny of impious tsars who do not respect religion: then Christ does not reign in such an evident and glorious way. On the contrary, when the pastors and teachers of the Church are humble, righteous, non-possessive, abstinent, prudent, zealous for piety and the glory of God, far from the spirit of the world and luxuriousness, under the protection of pious governments that are reverent before God, who teach the knowledge of God, piety and righteousness to the flocks entrusted to them, who lead them to salvation in accordance with the teaching and good order of the Apostles and Holy Fathers, who care about peace and the decency of the morals and customs of their flock; who destroy temptations; who shine to their flock in the purity of morals and holiness of life; who serve as objects of fear for the impious and vicious, but as consolation for the good: then Christ reigns in glory.

"But the Kingdom of Christ will be spiritual, and not sensual, as the so-called chiliasts of antiquity imagined it, thinking that Jesus Christ would in a visible manner come down from heaven to earth in Jerusalem, and would rule whole peoples like earthly, civil tsars. For the Kingdom of Christ is spiritual (John 18.36), and His glory is spiritual; it does not come in a noticeable manner (Luke 17.20,21), so that one could see it externally, it does not consist in external civil institutions and administration, it is not united with external pomp and splendour; according to the words of the Apostle Paul (Romans 14.17), the Kingdom of God consists not in the enjoyment of food and drink, in material goods, but in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The glorious Kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth will consist in the fact that, after the destruction of all the enemies of Christianity – paganism and antichristianity, there will come a peaceful, calm period in which the Church, after receiving into her bosom all the Jews and Gentiles, well constructed and ruled in accordance with the teaching and good order of the Apostles and Holy Fathers, enlightened by the Evangelical light of the knowledge of the truth and holiness, and enjoying the gifts of grace, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, will flourish in piety and good works under the care of prudent, righteous pastors, and under the protection of pious governments, and will widely spread the light of Evangelical truth, piety and glory."[414]

20.4. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgement was given to them.

The Ancient of Days came, and judgement was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom… And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatest of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High. Their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them. (Daniel 7.22, 27)

[414] Bishop Peter, *Explanation of the Apocalypse,* Tomsk, 1885, p. 237; in Barsov, op. cit., pp. 239-240.

The Lord said that the apostles would **sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel** (Matthew 19.28). But **judgement** over the unbelievers, according to David, **shall be to all His saints** (Psalm 149.9).

Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov writes: "The thrones of the saints are their dominion over the passions, over the demons themselves, over human weaknesses, over the elements, over beasts - the abundance of their spiritual gifts... They are given judgement, that is, spiritual discernment, by which they expose sin, with whatever fair appearance it may be covered, and reject it; they are given judgement, by which they judge the angels of darkness who take on the form of angels, and do not allow them to deceive them. They bowed down neither to the beast, nor to his image, neither to the Antichrist, nor to his forerunners, the persecutors of Christianity, who demanded from Christians that they renounce Christ and renounce His all-holy commandments. They received the seal of the enemy of God neither on their foreheads nor on their right hands, but acquired the mind of Christ, constantly expressing it in their thoughts and actions, not sparing even their blood in order to receive the seal of faithfulness of Christ. And for that reason they reigned with Christ. For them there is no death! For them the separation of the soul from the body - we repeat the thought of Basil the Great - is not death, but a passage from sorrowful wandering on earth to eternal joy and repose."[415]

It is also possible that the Eighth Ecumenical Council is being referred to, insofar as in the Ecumenical Councils the Holy Fathers triumphed over heresies and judged heretics. For as St. Nilus the Myrrh-Gusher prophesied: "A last and Eighth Ecumenical Council [will be convened] to deal with the disputes of heretics and separate the wheat from the tares".[416] And St. Seraphim also prophesied the convening of a last and Eighth Council that would defeat the western heresies and prepare the world for the final contest with the Antichrist[417] – which is not to say, however, that there may not be a false eighth council of the ecumenists before the true one of the True Orthodox.[418] At the true eighth Ecumenical Council the lives and writings of the saints will be the criterion for the judging of the heretics.

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[415] Bishop Ignatius, *On Signs and Wonders*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, 1960 (in Russian).

[416] Sotiropoulos, op. cit. See also the anonymous prophecy that the Greek Emperor John "will chase the bad priests from the sanctuary and re-establish the divine altar" (quoted in Delimpasy, op. cit., p. 65).

[417] St. Seraphim, text supplied by Fr. Victor Potapov. See also *Literaturnaia Ucheba*, January-February, 1991, pp. 131-134 (in Russian).

[418] Such a council has been planned for over thirty years now; and a false eighth council is hinted at by Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava: "I do not know anything about the Eighth Ecumenical Council yet. I can only tell you the words of St. Theodore the Studite: 'Not every meeting of bishops is a council, only those meetings of bishops which are held in Truth.' The validity of an Ecumenical Council depends not on the number of bishops gathered at it, but on whether it formulates philosophy or teachings 'in an Orthodox way'. If it deviates from truth it is not ecumenical even if it is called ecumenical." (*Selected Letters*, op. cit., p. 56).

20.4. And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

St. Cyprian of Carthage writes: "He says that all live and reign with Christ, not only those who have been slain; but even whosoever, standing in firmness of faith and the fear of God, have not worshipped the image of the beast, and have not consented to his deadly and sacrilegious edicts."[419]

These souls are clearly those whom the seer saw under the heavenly altar after the breaking of the fifth seal (6.11) - that is, the holy new martyrs of Russia. Evidently their petition is about to be answered, God's vengeance on His and their enemies is about to be accomplished. But why should they be said to live and reign with Christ for only a thousand years, and not forever? Perhaps the answer is that they only come to *live in the hearts of believers* on a large scale during the millennium, until the coming of the Antichrist consigns them to oblivion again – on earth, but not in heaven. And truly, the commemoration of the new martyrs of the 20th century started to become a mass phenomenon only towards the end of the 20th century, beginning with the canonization of the new martyrs by the Russian Church Abroad in 1981 - which led very quickly to the fall of Soviet power. The resurrection of the memory of the new martyrs, the acknowledgement by those living on earth that their struggle against Soviet power was just, and that they are living and reigning with Christ, is an essential first step to the resurrection of the Church on earth through their prayers.

"Here mention is made only of their souls, which have not yet been united with their bodies. From these words it is evident that the saints take part in the government of the Church of Christ on earth, and for that reason it is natural and right to address them with prayers, beseeching them to intercede for us before Christ, with Whom they rule." (Archbishop Averky)

20.5-6. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

The rest of the dead may refer to those who remained spiritually dead in the time of persecution, and who consequently were not counted among those for whom the Church prays that their memory may be eternal. But when the thousand years are finished, and the Last Judgement comes, they will again be brought to a kind of life – not spiritual, but bodily. For their bodies will be resurrected to **the resurrection of damnation.** For **the hour is**

[419] St. Cyprian, *Treatise 11, Exhortation to Martyrdom, to Fortunatus,* 2.

coming in which all that are in the graves will hear His voice, and they shall come forth: they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation (John 5.27-28).

"The expression: **lived not again** expresses the gloomy and painful condition after bodily death of the souls of impious sinners. It will continue **until the thousand years are finished.** As in many other passages of Sacred Scripture, this term 'until' (εως in Greek) does not signify the continuation of the action until a clearly defined time limit, but, on the contrary, the complete denial of such a limit (e.g. Matthew 1.25). In these words, therefore, we should see the denial of an eternally blessed life for the impious who have died. **Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power.** This is explained by St. Andrew of Caesarea as follows: 'From the Divine Scriptures we know that there are *two lives* and *two* killings, that is, *deaths*: the first life, as a punishment for transgression of the commandments, is temporal and carnal, the second, as a reward for fulfilment of the Divine commandments, is the eternal life promised to the saints. In a similar fashion there are two kinds of death: the one carnal and temporary, and the other eternal, being sent in the future as a punishment of sin, that is, fiery gehenna. Consequently, the meaning of these words is this: he who has lived here on earth in Christ Jesus and in the grace-filled life given by Him, and who after the first, i.e. bodily death has appeared before Him with flaming faith in Him has nothing to fear with regard to the second death, that is, fiery gehenna." (Archbishop Averky)

Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov writes: "**The first resurrection** is accomplished by means of two sacraments: baptism and repentance. Through holy baptism the soul is resurrected from the tomb of unbelief and dishonour, or from the original sin and his own sins that were committed in dishonour; while through repentance the already believing soul is resurrected from the dead brought about by his mortal sins, or by his laziness, by a pleasure-loving life after baptism…"[420]

Bishop Peter writes: "We may understand by the phrase **the first resurrection** the spiritual resurrection of people in Christianity, which begins with their conversion, justification and regeneration, in accordance with the words: **Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light** (Ephesians 5.14; John 5.24), and ends when the souls of the true Christians are transferred from the present life, which is for them as it were death, to true life with Jesus Christ."[421]

In accordance with this interpretation, the **first resurrection** - of souls, not bodies - could also mean the resurrection of the Church from her present obscurity through the prayers of the holy new martyrs, the setting of her light

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[420] Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Word on Death*; in Kim, op. cit., p. 180.
[421] Bishop Peter of Tomsk, *Explanation of the Apocalypse*, Tomsk, 1885, p. 240; in Barsov, op. cit., p. 431.

upon a lampstand for the whole world to see, when multitudes of nations, both Jews and Gentiles, will return to her bosom.

Thus according to New Hieromartyr Damascene of Glukhov, the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth could be "a short period of peace from the Lord (perhaps even a time when darkness will consider its work already completed), [when] the lamps [of faith] will be revealed, will be united, will light up many others which were about to go out, and will merge into a great flame of faith which, amidst the attempts to quench it, will only flare up more strongly, for many of those which have gone out and have felt the torment of the darkness and cold of Tartarus will prefer rather to burn on the fire of the flame of faith than to be immersed again in darkness. It is possible that this will be the moment which is indicated in a hidden manner under the image of 'the thousand-year reign with Christ'."[422]

However, when the Church is resurrected and spreads to the furthest ends of the earth, some will remain stubbornly in their unbelief, refusing to partake in this feast of faith. This is indicated by St. Cosmas, who in regard to the Muslims says that one third will be killed in the war, one third will be converted to Christianity, and one third will remain in unbelief.[423]

And the Prophet Zechariah declares concerning these stubborn unbelievers: **If any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain upon them. And if the family of Egypt do not go up and present themselves, then upon them shall come the plague with which the Lord afflicts the nations that go not up to the feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment to Egypt and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the feast of Tabernacles** (14.17-19).

In a general sense, therefore, the **first resurrection** can be said to represent the resurrection of the Church on earth through the spiritual resurrection to faith and membership of the Church that will take place after the Third World War. It will be a resurrection of souls, not bodies, and will anticipate, by its world-wide extent and the intensity of its joy, the general resurrection of the body at the very end of the world. However, it will not be the end of the world, but will rather prepare the world for the final battle against the Antichrist and the Second Coming of Christ.

Now several of the prophecies of the saints speak of the earth becoming like paradise after the Third World War, which recall the Old Testament prophecies of how it will be after the Coming of the Messiah. For example: "The earth's treasures will be opened up and everyone will become rich; and there will be no paupers; and the earth will bring forth a hundredfold; and the weapons of war will be turned into ploughs and scythes" (St. Methodius).

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[422] St. Damascene of Glukhov, in E.L. *Bishop-Confessors*, San Francisco, 1971, p. 85 (in Russian).
[423] St. Cosmas, in Metropolitan Augustine, op. cit.

Again: "After the general war the lion will live with the lamb" (St. Cosmas). The question is: are these prophecies of the New Testament saints referring to the same events as the messianic Old Testament prophecies whose images and metaphors they borrow?

Here we again come up against the problem of avoiding extremes of interpretation. The over-literal approach characteristic of the Judaizers would see in the messianic prophecies a revival of Judaism, with its sabbaths and circumcisions and animal sacrifices. However, this is definitely excluded both by St. Paul and by all of the Holy Fathers of the Church, who warn that it is precisely such false interpretations of the Scriptures that the Antichrist will use to justify his own dominion. They explain that where the Scriptures refer to Israel they are referring to the New Testament Church, and that the triumph of Israel throughout the world refers to the triumph of the Church.[424]

Thus when, for example, the Prophet Micah says: **He shall judge among many peoples, and shall rebuke strong nations from afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles; and nation shall no more lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn to war any more** (4.3), - he is speaking of the triumph of *the Church* in the millenial period. Again, when the Prophet Zechariah says: **And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall be left of all the nations that came up against Jerusalem, shall even come up every year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles** (14.16), he is not speaking of the universal triumph of the Jews and Judaism, as the Zionists and Judaizers like to think, but *of Christ and the Church*, t**he Feast of Tabernacles** being understood here as *the Christian fulfilment* of the Old Testament feast. For, as Jean Daniélou writes, "although the Jewish feast of Tabernacles has not been carried on into the Christian liturgy of today, this feast was seen by the Fathers of the Church as a figure of Christian realities."[425]

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[424] A useful rule of interpretation in this context has been provided by Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov), who writes: "The people of Israel are called both Jacob and Israel after the name of their forefather, who was named Jacob at birth and renamed Israel after he had been counted worthy of the vision of God; [but] in the spiritual sense Christians who have made significant spiritual progress are called Israel" ("On the Judgements of God", in the *Collected Works* (in Russian)).

[425] Dani*é*lou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966, p. 333. Thus St. Methodius of Olympus writes: "Only those who have celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles will enter into the holy land. Leaving their tabernacles, they hasten to arrive in the Temple and the City of God, that is to say, to a joy more great and more heavenly, as it took place among the Jews in the figures of these things. In the same way, indeed, as, having come out of the borders of Egypt, they, by journeying, came to tabernacles and, from there, having advanced still further, they reached the Promised land, so is it with us. I also, having started on the journey, I come out of the Egypt of this life, I come first to the Resurrection, to the true Scenopegia [feast of Tabernacles]. There, having built my beautiful tent on the first day of the feast, that of the judgement, I celebrate the feast with Christ during the millenium of rest, called the seven days, the true Sabbaths. Then, following Jesus Who has crossed the heavens, I start on my journey again, as they, after the rest of the Feast of Tabernacles, journeyed toward the land of promise, the heavens, not waiting any longer in tabernacles, that is to say, my tabernacle not remaining any longer the same, but, after the

David Baron writes: "Tabernacles was, above all the other feasts, the harvest festival of joy and thanksgiving, in celebration not only of the full ingathering of the **labours of the field**, but also of the fruit and of the vintage, and is therefore pre-eminently styled **the Feast of Ingatherings**" (Exodus 23.15; 34.22; Deuteronomy 16.13)".[426] It recalls the time when the Israelites, after finishing their forty-year passage through the wilderness, rested for a while in tents, or tabernacles, preparing for the final battle that would take place at the crossing of the Jordan (which means "judgement"), and anticipating the joys of the Promised Land. It was the only feast in the Jewish calendar that lasted for more than seven days. The eighth, **last and great day of the feast** (John 7.37), was the "crowning feast of all the feasts of the year," in the words of Philo the Alexandrian.[427]

In the same way, according to the present interpretation, the New Testament Church, after passing through the horrors of the Soviet yoke and in general the whole period of persecution at the hands of the western heretics since 1054, will be delivered from its enemies for a short time (about fifty years, according to the anonymous Athonite prophet of 1053). This will be the time of "ingathering", when the fullness both of the Gentiles and of the penitent Jews, will enter the Church. The people of God will be granted this period of rest and joy, expressed in the Christian fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles, in preparation for the final battle against the Antichrist and in anticipation of the more complete victory that will take place at the Second Coming of Christ and the General Resurrection.

In the Jewish calendar, the Feast of Tabernacles is immediately preceded by the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, which is devoted to profound repentance for sin. Thus the opening of the eyes of faith must be preceded by profound repentance. According to the Prophet Zachariah this same sequence will take place in the history of Israel. First the Lord says: **I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and compassion; and they shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced** [this is the Hebrew quoted in John 19.37; the Greek is: **because they have mocked Me], and they shall make lamentation for Him, as for a beloved Friend, and they shall grieve intensely, as for a First-Born Son** (12.10). Then the Lord will appear to them, and **His feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives** (14.4). And then **everyone that survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, there will be no rain upon them. And if the family of Egypt do not go up**

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millenium, having passed from a corruptible human form to an angelic grandeur and beauty. Then, going out from the place of tabernacles, having celebrated the feast of the Resurrection, we shall go towards better things, ascending to the house that is above the heavens" (*The Banquet*, IX, 5:120, in Daniélou, *Jewish Christianity*, op. cit., p. 337).

[426] Baron, *Zechariah*, op. cit., pp. 521-522.

[427] Baron, *Zechariah*, op. cit., p. 527.

and present themselves, then upon them shall come the plague with which the Lord afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (14.16-18).

The Lord may have been referring to this joyful event when He said to the impenitent Jews: **Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord** (Matthew 23.38-39). For **Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord** is the verse sung at the climax of the Feast of Tabernacles. It is as if the Lord were saying: "You will not see Me with the eyes of faith until you are converted and participate with the whole of the New Testament Church in the Christian fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles."

St. John of Kronstadt has the same interpretation. The verses Matthew 23.38-39, he says, "mean: I will cease to be your Messiah until you recognize Me as such. In the meantime I will reveal My Face to the Gentiles, who have not heard about Me. The holy Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans (11.25) announces that **the hardening has taken place in Israel in part until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in.** And this, as is evident from the Revelation of St. John the Theologian, will take place in the sixth period of the last ages, when terrible times will come accompanied by great astronomical signs and unusual physical phenomena. Then the whole of the true Israel, in the number determined in the Apocalypse, will be saved, that is, will believe in Christ as their Messiah and God. The remaining Jews will become still more hardened and will recognize the son of destruction, the Antichrist, as their messiah, king and god, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Christ the Saviour given to the Jews who did not believe in Him: **I have come in the name of My Father, and you do not receive Me: but if another will come in his own name, you will receive him** (John 5.43)." (p. 48)

Thus the Feast of Tabernacles celebrates a kind of "resurrection before the Resurrection", an ingathering of the last good fruits of both the Jews and the Gentiles, a period of rest for the Church before her last battle with the Antichrist, her crossing the river of the Last Judgement, and her ascent to the Heavenly Jerusalem, where she puts on the tabernacle of the Resurrection Body.

Daniélou points out that the liturgy of the feast of Tabernacles is similar to the liturgy of Palm Sunday [notably in the use of the verse, **Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord**], which is a similar "resurrection before the Resurrection" and - to the liturgical rites described in the Apocalypse. "The whole liturgy of the Feast of Tabernacles serves St. John in the Apocalypse to describe the procession of the elect around the heavenly altar. It is, in fact, the liturgy of this Feast which we are to recognize in the passage of the Apocalypse (7.9-17) describing the **great crowd** which stands before the throne of the Lamb. Many details are connected with the Feast: the palm-branches ('phoiniches') in their hands, the white robes, which recall the garments of Christ at the Transfiguration (7.9), the tabernacle in which the

Lord dwells in the midst of the elect ('scenosei') (7.15), the springs of living water where they quench their thirst (7.17). We have here, on the second level of eschatology, the projection of the first fulfillment which was, on the level of the Gospel, the episode of Palm Sunday..."[428]

The liturgical links between the Feast of Tabernacles and Palm Sunday reflect a profound prophetic parallelism; for as on Palm Sunday, so on the future Feast of the Tabernacles, the Jews acclaim Christ as the Messiah and their true king - temporarily. But just as Palm Sunday was followed by Great Friday and the Crucifixion of Christ, when the Jews who had hailed Christ five days before called for His death, saying "Crucify Him!", so the same race of the Jews, after turning to Christ after the World War and joining the Church in fulfilment of the prophecies (Romans 11), and after participating with the Christian Gentiles in the Christian Feast of Tabernacles, will turn against Him again to worship the Antichrist, in fulfilment of many other prophecies. For it is of this, the Jewish worship of the Antichrist at the end of time, that the Lord says: **I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive** (John 5.43).

While recognizing that many of the Old Testament prophecies about Israel are actually talking about the Church, it is impossible to allegorize these prophecies to such an extent that *all* references to the race of the Jews and to the physical land of Israel are excluded. For the triumph of the Church in the millenial period will be at the same time *the return of the Jews to the Church*, as was prophesied by St. Paul in Romans 9 to 11, and by St. John in the Apocalypse, as we have seen (e.g. 3.9, 7.4-8). Therefore the apparent confusion of the categories of the Old and New Testament Churches may be deliberate, as pointing, not to the return of the Christians to the worship of the Old Testament, but to the return of the Jews to the Church, **the turning again of the heart of the father to the son** (Malachi 4.5).[429]

The earliest such prophecy we find in Deuteronomy: **When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and**

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[428] Daniélou, *Jewish Christianity*, op. cit., p. 342.

[429] "It is curious that St. Irenaeus of Lyons, the disciple of Papias, confirms his opinion on the earthly Kingdom of the saints by witnesses from the prophets of the Old Testament, and refers to Isaiah 26.19, 30.25, 58.14; Jeremiah 23.7-8, 28.25-26" (Kim, op. cit., p. 130).

numerous than your fathers. The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. The Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you. You will again obey the Lord and follow all his commands I am giving you today. (30.1-8).

One of the clearest of these prophecies is in Ezekiel, where, after describing how the Jews will spend seven months clearing up after the destruction of Gog and Magog, the prophet continues: **All the nations shall know that the house of Israel was led captive because of their sins, because they rebelled against Me, and I turned My face from them, and delivered them into the hands of their enemies, and they all fell by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions did I deal with them, and I turned My face from them. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Now will I turn back captivity in Jacob, and will have mercy on the house of Israel, and will be jealous for the sake of My holy name** (39.23-25). **For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you** [baptism]**, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses… And you shall be My people, and I will be your God** (Ezekiel 36.24-25,28).

Again, in Jeremiah we read: **Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days, says the Lord, that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord'. It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore. At that time Jerusalem shall be called the Throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem. Nor more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers** (3.16-18).

Again, in Zephaniah we read: **From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My suppliants, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring Me offering. On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against Me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain. For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord, those who are left in Israel... I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors, and I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gathered you together; yea, I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.** (3.10-13,18-20).

Again, the Lord says through the Prophet Zechariah: **I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and compassion; and they shall look on Me Whom they pierced** (i.e. the Crucified Christ)**, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns over a first-born** (12.10). Thus pierced with a true spirit of repentance, "Jacob", the Jews, will return to "Israel", the Church.

And so all Israel (i.e. Christian Jews and Gentiles together) **will be saved; as it is written: The deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob** (Romans 11.26; Isaiah 59.20).[430]

The Apostle Paul calls the conversion of the Jews to Christ **life from the dead** (Romans 11.15). Therefore it is entirely fitting that this event, combined with the simultaneous harvest of **the fullness of the Gentiles** (Romans 11.25), should be called **the first resurrection** in the Apocalypse.

"Then," writes St. Agathangelus, "honey and milk will flow in everything; the sea storms will cease, and for fully fifty years shall peace reign; truth shall triumph, and the sky shall rejoice in true glory; the Orthodox Faith shall be uplifted and shall spring from East to West in order to be praised and blessed; the barbarians shall be overcome with fright and, wholly trembling, shall flee headlong speedily, abandoning the world's metropolis; then God shall be glorified, and man shall see the works of His omnipotence. Let it be so, and it shall be so."

Or, as St. Cosmas of Aitolia writes: "Blessed is he that shall live after the general war. He will eat with spoons of silver."[431]

20.7-8. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

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[430] Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) interprets this passage to mean that all of the Jews will be saved: "Not of a single people - not of the Russians, or of the Greeks - has it been said that all of their descendants will be saved in due time, as this is said of the Jews" ("Sermon on the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing women", 1903; *Living Orthodoxy*, N 83, vol. XIV, no. 5, September-October, 1992, p. 37). But this is surely a mistake. We know that the Antichrist, for one, will be a Jew and will *not* be saved. For other interpretations of this passage, see Sergius Fomin, op. cit., p. 296.

[431] Cf. Professor Pangiotis Trembelas: "Then the Church will be able to celebrate peace on earth as an annunciatory dawn of the eternal Day without evening of the future Kingdom and will be able to see the ideal of her combats and efforts realized. At that moment the devil will have been truly bound, for if evil has not been completely annihilated, it will nevertheless be reduced to impotence. There will no longer exist a human will strong enough to oppose Christianity and the Christian spirit will predominate everywhere. States and institutions will be inspired by it; the sciences and arts, in the service of Christian thought, will find their true ideal and will serve glorified humanity. There will be a religious resurrection, the tombs of ecclesiastical history will be opened, the whole past will be revealed to live again in a memory always present and alive..." (*Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church*, Chevetogne, 1961, vol. III, pp. 474-477 (in French)).

And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Gog, and the land of Magog, Rhos, prince of Mesoch and Thobel, and prophesy against him, and say to him, Thus saith the Lord God: I am against thee Rhos, prince of Mesoch and Thobel… Wilt thou not arise in that day, when My people Israel are dwelling securely, and come out from thy place from the farthest north, and many nations with thee? all of them mounted on horses, a great gathering, and a large force? And thou shalt come up upon My people Israel as a cloud shall cover the land; it shall come to pass in the last days (Ezekiel 38.1-3, 14-6).

Josephus says that **Magog** (or **Gog**) was the ancestor of the Scythians, who also originally inhabited the Black Sea area.[432] Saints Ephraim the Syrian[433], John Chrysostom[434] and Theodoretus[435] understand by **Gog and Magog** the peoples who oppressed the Jews soon after their return from exile in Babylon, or Antiochus Epiphanes and his armies.

"Some think," writes St. Andrew of Caesarea, "that **Gog and Magog** are the distant peoples of the Scythians, or, as we call them, the Huns, the most warlike and numerous of all the peoples of the earth. Only by the Divine right hand are they held back from taking control of the whole earth until the liberation of the devil. Others, translating from the Hebrew, say that 'Gog' signifies 'meeting' or 'assembly', and 'Magog' - 'raised' or 'exaltation'. One must know that Ezekiel prophesied concerning these peoples, that **they shall come in the last days with great power and fall on the land of Israel; and their weapons, because of their great number, will burn for seven years**.

"Some interpreters of this word of the prophet have referred [this event] to the battle of the Assyrians under Sennacherib with Hezekiah. But this event took place many years before the prophecy of Ezekiel. Others refer them to the defeat of the peoples who attacked the inhabitants of Jerusalem when they, after the Babylonian captivity, wanted to repair and strengthen the walls of the city in accordance with the command, first of the Persian Cyrus, and then of Darius. They also refer them to the armies of Antiochus, which were defeated by the Maccabees. It is clear, however, that their advent above all refers to the last times. It is possible to assert this, first, because nowhere in the sacred books is there mention of wars of the Jews with the Scythians, only of wars with neighbouring peoples who envied their modern enrichment; secondly, because it is written concerning Gog that he will be prepared from ancient times and will come in the last times; and thirdly, because in this revelation foretelling the future (Revelation ch. 20) it is said that Gog and Magog will come at the end of the age."

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[432] Josephus, *On Antiquities*, VI, 1. St. Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople in the fifth century, had the same interpretations (see Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, VII, 41).
[433] St. Ephraim, volume V in the Russian edition of his works, p. 58.
[434] St. Chrysostom, volume V in the Russian edition of his works, p. 688.
[435] Kim, op. cit., p. 108.

St. Jerome writes: "The word **Magog** is used for the first time in the Book of Genesis (10.2). It is one of the sons of Japheth. In the prophecy of Ezekiel there is mention of **Gog and Magog**; from there these names have been transferred to the Apocalypse with the same meanings with which they were understood by Ezekiel, but with a different denotation. **Gog** in Ezekiel is represented as a glorious and terrible conqueror who invades the land of the people of Israel with a large army (38.15-16)… God was a weapon of the wrath of God against Israel, but then because of his cruelty and impiety was also made an object of revenge of the wrath of God. The word **Magog** meant either the land, or the people, commanded by **Gog**… From the Apocalypse it is evident that prophecies sometimes referred, in the same words, also to the judgement of God on the impiety of the last times in the existence of the world, the time of the coming, kingdom and dominion of the last Antichrist. **Gog** has always been understood to refer to a savage and warlike ruler commanding a numerous army of warriors of various races who tramples on the laws of God, a bloodthirsty evildoer, an enemy of God, the faith and the Church and the worship of God. **Gog** is the Antichrist; **Magog –** his army. **Gog** means one who gathers, and **Magog –** a gathering of the peoples."[436]

St. Jerome interprets the words **Rhos, Mosoch** and **Thobel** to mean "head", "insanity" and "universal", respectively.[437] The fact that the **Rhos** (Ρως) of Ezekiel's prophecy is identified by Leo the Deacon in the late tenth century with Russia[438], has naturally led many people to identify **Gog and Magog** with Russia and its allies, Soviet Russia (and its neo-Soviet successor) being indeed "the head of universal insanity". This supposition is strengthened by the fact that **Gog and Magog** are said to come **from the extreme north**, which can only mean Russia, and **in the last times.**[439]

There are two important differences between the prophecy of Ezekiel and the present prophecy about Gog and Magog. The first is that whereas Ezekiel's Gog and Magog come **from the extreme north** (38.6; cf. 38.15, 39.2; Joel 2.20), John's come from **the four quarters of the earth**. The second is that whereas the destruction of Ezekiel's Gog and Magog is followed by several more years of terrestrial life, that of John is followed by the Last Judgement.

The reason for this difference is that while Ezekiel's vision is of the *collective* Antichrist, John's is of the *personal* Antichrist. Between the destruction of the collective Antichrist and the rise of the personal Antichrist comes the

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[436] St. Jerome, *Interpretation of the Apocalypse,* 20.7.

[437] St. Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 454; *P.L.* XXV.

[438] See M. Siuziumov, "K Voprosu O Prosikhozhdeniu Slova Ρως, Ρωσια, Rossia", in *Russia before the Second Coming,* Moscow, 1004, pp. 692-694.

[439] See also Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record,* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1976, pp. 247-248. For more references on the identification of these names, see Fomin, S. & Fomina, T. *Russia before the Second Coming*, Sergiev Posad, 1998, third edition, volume II, pp. 475-506 (in Russian). However, other writers have rejected the identification of Ezekiel's **Gog and Magog** with Russia. See Ant. Florovsky, "'The Prince Ros' in the Prophet Ezekiel", in Fomin, S. & Fomina, T. op. cit., pp. 682-691.

millenium, during which True Christianity will spread to the four quarters of the earth. Hence the transition from the local to the universal: whereas in 1917, the beginning of the reign of the collective Antichrist, True Christianity was mainly concentrated in the Russian Empire and the Balkans, before the reign of the personal Antichrist it will have spread everywhere, eliciting a universal persecution of it by the dark forces.

But if Ezekiel's **Gog and Magog** refer to the forces of the *collective* Antichrist *before* the millennium, and St. John's **Gog and Magog** refer to the forces of the *personal* Antichrist *after* the millennium, why are both sets of forces called by the same name of **Gog and Magog**? Evidently because *spiritually speaking, in their antichristian aims and spirit,* they are identical.[440]

20.9-10. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints above, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the Devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Let the wicked be cut off, that he may not behold the glory of the Lord (Isaiah 26.10).

20.11. And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from Whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them.

I beheld until the thrones were set, and the Ancient of days sat; and His raiment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was as pure wool; his throne was a flame of fire, and his wheels burning fire. A stream of fire rushed forth before Him: thousand thousands ministered to Him, and myriad myriads attended upon Him: the judgement sat, and the books were opened (Daniel 7.9-10).

"This is a picture of the universal judgement of God on the human race. The whiteness of the throne on which the supreme Judge sits signifies the holiness and righteousness of His judgement." (Archbishop Averky)

The fleeing away of the heavens and the earth is explained by the Apostle Peter: **The Day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up** (II Peter 3.10). For, as David says: **In the beginning, O Lord, Thou**

[440] Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov writes: "In the 38th and 39th chapters of the Prophet Ezekiel is described the power and numerousness of a northern people called Ross; this people must attain a huge level of material development before the end of the world, and by its end will bring to an end the history of the wandering of the human race on earth. A reference is made to these chapters of Ezekiel in the 20th chapter of the Apocalypse…" (Letter to N.N. Muraviev-Karsky, May 14, 1863; in Fomin and Fomina, vol. II, p. 551) (in Russian).

didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou abidest; and all like a garment shall grow old, and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them, and they shall be changed (Psalm 101: 25-26; Hebrews 1.10-12).

20.12. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

In Daniel we read: **And at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever** (12.1-3).

"The opened books represent the acts and conscience of each person. One of them is the book of life in which are written the names of the saints." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

"The opened books symbolically signify the omniscience of God, to Whom all the works of men are known. The book of life is only one, as a sign of the small quantity of the elect of God who are to be heirs of salvation." (Archbishop Averky)

20.13. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hades delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works.

St. Methodius of Patara writes: "Does this not indicate the return of the particles (of the dead bodies) by the elements, for the restoration of each of them?"[441]

"The meaning of this is that *everyone* without exception will be resurrected and stand before the Judgement of God." (Archbishop Averky)

20.14-15. And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

"This is said with the meaning that those who are glorified and saved will no longer fear either death or hades: for them death and hades will cease to exist forever. By the **lake of fire** and **second death** are to be understood the eternal condemnation of sinners, whose names did not appear in the Lord's book of life." (Archbishop Averky)

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[441] St. Methodius of Patara, *on the Resurrection*; in Kim, op. cit., p. 124.

"The **second death** is… the cutting off from God of a sinful soul which lives in carnal desires, of which the Lord says: **Let the dead bury the dead** (Matthew 8.22; Luke 9.60)." (Patriarch Anthimus) For, as St. John Chrysostom says, "many even of those who seem to live are no better than dead men, living as they do in wickedness."[442]

St. Ephraim writes: "We know from the Gospel that there are various places of torment. For it has been revealed to us that there is **exterior darkness** (Matthew 8.12), and so it follows that there is also **interior darkness**. The fire of **gehenna** (Matthew 5.29) is another place, the abode of **weeping and gnashing of teeth** (Matthew 25.30). Another place speaks of **the worm that dieth not** (Mark 9.43). We read in another place of **the lake of fire** (Rev. 19.15). The lower world of **destruction** and perdition are written of in precise terms (Matthew 7.13; I Timothy 6.9). The depths of the earth is another place. The hell where sinners are tormented, and **the depths of hell**, a more fearful place. The wretched souls of the damned are distributed throughout these places of punishment, each one according to the nature of his sins; fearfully or less fearfully, as it is written: **Each one is fast bound by the ropes of his own sins** (Proverbs 5.22); and this is what is meant by the servant who is beaten with **many** stripes or **with few stripes** (Luke 12.47, 48). For just as there are differences of sin so also are there differences in their punishment."[443]

St. Gregory Palamas writes: "Although in the future restoration, when the bodies of the righteous will be raised, the bodies of the lawless and sinners will also be raised, they will be raised only so as to be subjected to **the second death**: to eternal torment, **the unsleeping worm** (Mark 9.48), **the gnashing of teeth** (Matthew 8.12), **the outer** and impenetrable **darkness** (Matthew 8.12), to dark and inextinguishable **gehenna** (Matthew 5.22). The prophet says: **The lawless and sinners shall be burnt up together, and there shall be none to quench it** (Isaiah 1.31; cf. Jeremiah. 4.4). For this is **the second death**, as John teaches us in his Revelation."[444]

"For at that time the trumpet shall sound (I Thessalonians 4.16)," writes St. Hippolytus, "and awake those that sleep from the lowest parts of the earth, righteous and sinners alike. And every kindred, and tongue, and nation, and tribe shall be raised in the twinkling of an eye (I Corinthians 15.52); and they shall stand before the face of the earth, waiting for the Coming of the righteous and terrible Judge, in fear and trembling unutterable. For the river of fire shall come forth in fury like an angry sea, and shall burn up mountains and hills, and shall make the sea vanish, and shall dissolve the atmosphere with its heat like wax (II Peter 3.12). The stars of heaven shall fall (Matthew 24.29), the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood (Acts

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[442] St. Chrysostom, *Homily 27 on Matthew*, 7.
[443] St. Ephraim, *Sermon 72*; translated by M.F. Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, London: Longmans, 1959, vol. 3, p. 302.
[444] St. Gregory Palamas, *To the Nun Xenia, P.G.* 150.1043-1088.

2.20). The heaven shall be rolled together like a scroll (Rev. 6.19): the whole earth shall be burnt up by reason of the deeds done in it, which men did corruptly, in fornications, in adulteries, and in lies and uncleanness, and in idolatries, and in murders, and in battles. For there shall be **a new heaven and a new earth**."[445]

[445] St. Hippolytus, *Discourse on the End of the World, and on Antichrist, and on the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*, 37.

10. The Eighth Day

"Immediately after this St. John was shown the spiritual beauty and greatness of the new Jerusalem, that is, the Church of Christ, which is to be revealed in all her glory at the Second Coming of Christ after the victory over the devil." (Archbishop Averky)

21.1. And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

For there shall be a new heaven and a new earth; and they shall not at all remember the former, neither shall it again come into their mind. But they shall find in her joy and exultation; for behold, I make Jerusalem a rejoicing, and My people a joy (Isaiah 65.17-18).

We, according to His promise, wait for a new heaven and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness (II Peter 3.13).

"Here mention is made, not of the passing away into non-existence of creation, but of its change to a better state, as the apostle witnesses: **the creature itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God** (Romans 8.21). And the divine Psalmist says: **As a vesture shalt Thou fold them, and they shall be changed** (Psalm 101.27) The renewal of that which has grown old signifies, not the obliteration and annihilation, but the removal of old age and wrinkles." (St. Andrew of Caesarea)

"This newness of heaven and earth will consist in their transfiguration and in the newness of their forms and qualities, not in a change in their very substance. The sea, as the inconstant and volatile element, will disappear." (Archbishop Averky)

St. Irenaeus writes: "The predicted blessing belongs unquestionably to the times of the Kingdom, when the righteous shall bear rule upon their rising from the dead; when also the creation, having been renovated and set free, shall fructify with an abundance of all kinds of food, from the dew of heaven, and from the fertility of the earth: as the elders who saw John, the disciple of the Lord, related that they had heard from him how the Lord used to teach in regard to these times, and says: The days will come, in which vines shall grow, each having ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in each one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five and twenty measures of wine. And when any one of the saints shall lay hold of a cluster, another shall cry out, 'I am a better cluster, take me; bless the Lord through me.' In like manner [the Lord declared] that a grain of wheat would produce ten thousand ears, and that every ear should have ten thousand grains, and every grain would yield ten pounds of clear, pure, fine flour; and that all other fruit-bearing trees, and

seeds and grass, would produce in similar proportions; and that all animals feeding [only] on the produce of the earth, should [in those days] become peaceful and harmonious among each other, and be in perfect subjection to man.

"And these things are borne witness to in writing by Papias, the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp, in his fourth book; for there were five books compiled by him. And he says in addition, 'Now these things are credible to believers.' And he says that 'when the traitor Judas did not give credit to them, and put the question, "How then can things about to bring forth so abundantly be wrought by the Lord?" the Lord declared: "They who shall come to these [times] shall see."' When prophesying of these times, therefore, Isaiah says: **The wolf also shall feed with the lamb, and the leopard shall take his rest with the kid; the calf also, and the bull, and the lion shall eat together; and a little boy shall lead them. The ox and the bear shall feed together, and their young ones shall agree together; and the lion shall eat straw as well as the ox. And the infant boy shall thrust his hand into the asp's den, into the nest also of the adder's brood; and they shall do not harm, nor have power to hurt anything in My holy mountain.** And again he says, in recapitulation: **Wolves and lambs shall then browse together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the serpent earth as if it were bread; and they shall neither hurt nor annoy anything in My holy mountain, saith the Lord.** (11.6-9) I am quite aware that some persons endeavour to refer these words to the case of savage men, both of different nations and various habits, who come to believe, and when they have believed, act in harmony with the righteous. But although this is [true] now with regard to some men coming from various nations to the harmony of the faith, nevertheless in the resurrection of the just [the words shall also apply] to those animals mentioned. For God is rich in all things. And it is right that when the creation is restored, all the animals should obey and be in subjection to man, and revert to the food originally given by God (for they had been originally subjected in obedience to Adam), that is, the produce of the earth."[446]

St. Narses says: "The heavens are made new, the earth is made new; it is green and puts forth leaves in gladness. And the kingdom is thirtyfold, as also the garden sixtyfold, and the heavens hundredfold.[447] And there shall not be on earth any toil or sweat; no crafty serpent nor beguiling woman; but there shall be trees that fade not with their fruit, and all pain and sorrow shall be removed, and there shall be only joy and delight. And to some he will give a kingdom upon earth; but for the martyrs there gleam scarlet crowns and robes and glory. With them are the virgins, who polluted not themselves on this earth; along with the Virgin Mary shall they receive the adornment of the

[446] St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 33.
[447] This refers to the traditional division of the heavenly places into Paradise, the City (or the Kingdom) and the Heavens. See below, *Fragments of Papias*, V.

crown of glory, transfigured. Like the sun among the stars, even so shall excel the glory of the virgins amidst the wedded ones."[448]

21.2. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride for her husband.

I looked back with mine eyes, and upon the right side I saw a woman... I looked, and behold, the woman appeared to me no more, but there was a city builded... This woman, whom thou sawest, is Sion.. even she whom thou seest as a city builded. (II (4) Esdras 9.38, 10.27, 10.44)

"There meeteth me a virgin arrayed as if she were going forth from a bridechamber, all in white... veiled up to her forehead, and her head-covering consisted of a turban, and her hair was white. I knew from the former visions that it was the Church..."[449]

Here is the revelation of the Heavenly Church, consisting now of all the elect who ever lived, both those who died before the Coming of the Lord in glory and those **who are alive, who are left** to be **caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air** (I Thessalonians 4.17). She is **prepared as a bride** because all her members are clothed in the glorious resurrection body (John 5.29; I Corinthians 15.35-51). She is prepared for her Bridegroom, Christ, Who comes at the midnight of world history to take His Bride into the heavenly Bridal chamber (Matthew 22.1-14; 25.1-13).[450]

Let my soul rejoice in the Lord; for He has clothed me with the robe of salvation, and the garment of joy: He has put a mitre on me as on a bridegroom, and adorned me with ornaments as a bride (Isaiah 61.10).

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one Husband (II Corinthians 11.2).

St. Irenaeus writes: "Of this Jerusalem the former one is an image - that Jerusalem of the former earth in which the righteous are disciplined beforehand for incorruption and prepared for salvation. And of this tabernacle Moses received the pattern in the mount (Exodus 25.40); and nothing is capable of being allegorized, but all things are steadfast, and true, and substantial, having been made by God for righteous men's enjoyment. For as it is God truly who raises up man, so also does man truly rise from the dead, and not allegorically, as I have shown repeatedly. And as he rises actually, so also shall he be actually disciplined beforehand for incorruption,

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[448] St. Narses, in Bousset, op. cit., p. 259.
[449] *The Shepherd of Hermas*, IV, 2.1-2.
[450] On the falsehood of the Protestant idea that the Christians will be taken up "in rapture" to meet the Lord in the air *before* the great tribulation and the reign of the Antichrist, see Dennis Engleman, "The Rapture: Emancipation or Entrapment?", *The True Vine*, vol. 3., no. 4, 1992, pp. 25-30.

and shall go forwards and flourish in the times of the Kingdom, in order he may be capable of receiving the glory of the Father."[451]

St. Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis writes: "As the presbyters say, then those who are deemed worthy of an abode in heaven shall go there, others shall enjoy the delights of Paradise, and others shall posses the splendour of the city; for everywhere the Saviour will be seen, according as they shall be worthy who see Him. But that there is this distinction between the habitation of those who produce an hundredfold, and that of those who produce sixtyfold, and that of those who produce thirtyfold; for the first will be taken up into the heavens, the second class will dwell in Paradise, and the last will inhabit the city; and that on this account the Lord said: **In My Father's house there are many mansions** (John 14.2); for all things belong to God, Who supplies all with a suitable dwelling-place, even as His word says, that a share is given to all by the Father, according as each one is or shall be worthy."[452]

St. Ambrose of Milan writes: "If, therefore, we find the city let us enter it, let us look at its light, its wall, its tribes, the foundations of its walls, and let us also see the watchmen on the walls. But how may we enter? In this city there is only one way, leading to life, for Christ is the way. Hence, let us follow Christ. But this city is in heaven. The manner in which we may ascend to heaven is taught by the Evangelist who says, 'And the Spirit carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven.' That is, we may ascend in spirit, since flesh cannot reach her. Let us, in the interim, rise to heaven so that from heaven this city may later descend to us. In it the light is like a precious stone, such as the stone of jasper and crystal, and its wall is great and high."

"Under the image of this **new Jerusalem** is represented the triumphant *Church of Christ*, which is adorned as the bride of the Lord with the purity and good works of the saints. 'This city,' says St. Andrew, 'which has Christ as its corner-stone, is composed of the saints, of whom it is written: **holy stones are rolled upon His land** (Zechariah 9.16).'" (Archbishop Averky)

21.3-4. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

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[451] St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 35.
[452] *Fragments of Papias*, V; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, volume I, p. 154.

St. Germanus of Constantinople says: "The Church is the earthly heaven in which the heavenly God dwells and moves."[453]

"The Old Testament tabernacle was only a type of the dwelling of God with men, which will begin in the future eternally blessed life and will be the found of blessedness for men, now freed from all the sorrows of the present earthly life." (Archbishop Averky)

And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and will be glad in My people; and there shall be no more heard in her the voice of weeping, or the voice of crying (Isaiah 65.19).

21.5-6. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And He said unto me, It is done.

"That is: I create a new life, completely different from the former one; all that was promised will be fulfilled.

21.6. I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.

"That is: everything that I promise is already as it were fulfilled, for before My eyes the future and the present are one and the same undivided moment.

21.6. And I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

"That is: the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is prefigured in Holy Scripture under the image of living water (cf. John 4.10-14; 7.37-39).

21.7. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.

"That is: all these good things shall he who conquers in the battle with the unseen demons receive, and he shall be made a son of God." (Archbishop Averky)

And I shall be to you a Father, and you shall be My sons and daughter, says the Lord Almighty (II Corinthians 6.18).

21.8. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

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[453] St. Germanus, *P.G.* 98, 383; translated in Eric Jay, *The Church*, London: SPCK, 1977, vol. 1, p. 149.

"The fearful who do not have courage in the battle with the devil, the sinners, those given to passions and vices, will be condemned to **the second death**, that is, the eternal torments of hell." (Archbishop Averky)

For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of strength and love and chastity (II Timothy 1.7).

21.9. And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

"As is evident from the above, **bride** and **wife of the Lamb** are names for *the Church of Christ*. 'Rightly is she called,' says St. Andrew, 'the **bride** and **wife of the Lamb**, for when Christ was immolated as the Lamb He betrothed her to Himself by His Blood. Just as a wife was created for Adam in his sleep through the taking of one of his ribs, so the Church was established by the outpouring of blood from the ribs of Christ as He was voluntarily sleeping the sleep of death on the Cross, and was joined to the wounded One for our sakes.'" (Archbishop Averky)

St. Clement of Rome writes: "The Church is not of the present age, but is from above. For She is spiritual, like our Jesus, and was revealed in the last times in order to save us. And the Church, though spiritual, was revealed in the Flesh of Christ..."[454]

21.10-11. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.

"The bride of the Lamb, or the Holy Church, was presented before the spiritual vision of the seer of mysteries in the form of a beautiful great city, *Jerusalem* descending from heaven. The whole of the remaining part of the chapter is devoted to a detailed description of this wonderful city. Shining with precious stones, this city had twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles. A characteristic trait of the city is that:

21.11-14. Her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lord.

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[454] *II Clement*, 14, 1. This idea of the pre-existence of the Church is found also in *The Shepherd of Hermas*. Cf. Danielou, *Jewish Christianity*, op. cit., p. 297.

"These gates, grouped in threes, face all the ends of the earth so that we would know that God opened paradise for the entire universe. **The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth** (Psalm 49.1), for He wants all to be saved."[455]

"'The light of the Church,' says St. Andrew, 'is Christ, Who is called a **jasper** as always growing, blossoming, life-giving and pure.'

"A high wall surrounds the city as a sign that no one who is unworthy can enter there; the same thought is expressed by the fact that it is guarded at the twelve gates by a guard of angels of God. The gates bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, for just as on earth these tribes composed the community of the elect people of God, so their names comprehend also the heavenly elect - the new Israel. On the twelve foundations of the wall are written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lord, as a sign, of course, that the apostles are the foundation on which the Church is established, as the founders of the Christian Faith among all the nations of the earth. Here it is impossible not to see a rejection of the false dogma of the Latins that the Church of Christ is founded on the Apostle Peter alone." (Archbishop Averky)

Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in Whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2.20-21).

21.15-17. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as the breadth; and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.

"The city is measured by an angel in the eyes of the holy seer with the help of a golden reed. 'The **golden reed**,' says St. Andrew, 'indicates the uprightness of the measuring angel, who was seen in the form of a man, as well as the worthiness of the measured city, by whose **wall** we understand Christ.' The city has the shape of an exact square, and the equal dimensions of its height, length and breadth show it to be in the form of a cube, which signifies its firmness and strength. The height of the wall of the city is one hundred and forty-four cubits. All these numerical expressions are used, we must suppose, to signify the perfection, firmness and wonderful symmetry of the integral building of the Church of God.

21.18-20. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation

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[455] Bishop Elias Miniatos, "On Predestination", *Orthodox Life,* vol. 40, no. 6, November-December, 1990, p. 30.

was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

"The wall of the city is built of jasper, which symbolizes the Divine glory and the forever blossoming and unfading life of the saints. The city itself was of pure gold, like clear glass, as a sign of the uprightness and radiance of its inhabitants. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones; each of the foundations in particular represented one solid precious stone. As St. Andrew notes, of the twelve precious stones eight were borne on the pallium of the ancient high-priest, together with four others - to show the agreement of the New Testament with the Old and the pre-eminence of those who shone out in it. And with justice, for the apostles signified by the precious stones were adorned with every kind of virtue. According to the interpretation of St. Andrew the meaning of these twelve stones is as follows: the first foundation - **jasper** - is a stone of greenish hue which signifies the leading Apostle Peter, who bore in his body the death of Christ and who showed a blossoming and unfading love for Him; the second - **sapphire** - which is sky-blue, signifies the blessed Paul, who was taken up to the third heaven; the third - **chalcedony** - apparently the same as **anthrax**, which was in the high priest's pallium, signifies the blessed Apostle Andrew, who was like a coal burning with the Spirit; the fourth - **emerald** - of a green colour, feeding on oil and from it receiving its brilliance and beauty, signifies the holy Evangelist John, who with Divine oil softens the vexation and despondency caused in us by our sins and who with the precious gift of Theology provides us with never-weakening faith; the fifth - **sardonyx** - a stone of the colour of a shining human nail, signifies James, the first to suffer bodily death for Christ; the sixth - **sardius** - brilliant orange in colour, and medicinal for tumours and wounds caused by iron, signifies the beauty of the good works of the Blessed Philip, shining with the fire of the Divine Spirit and healing the spiritual wounds of the deceived; the seventh - **chrysolite** - shining with gold, signifies, perhaps, Bartholomew, shining with much-prized good works and Divine preaching; the eighth - **beryl** - having the colour of the sea and air, signifies Thomas, who completed a long journey for the salvation of the Indians; the ninth - **topaz** - a black stone, shedding, so they say, a silky juice that heals those suffering from eye diseases, signifies the Blessed Matthew, who healed with his Gospel those blind in heart and feeds with milk those newly born in the Faith; the tenth - **chrysoprasus** - exceeding gold itself in brightness, signifies the Blessed Thaddeus, who preached to Abgar, king of Edessa, the Kingdom of Christ, signified by gold (**chryso-**) and mortification (**prasus**); the eleventh - **jacinth** - azure or sky-blue in colour, rightly signifies Simon, as a zealot of Christ's gifts and possessor of heavenly wisdom; the twelfth - **amethyst** - a crimson-coloured stone, signifies Matthias, who was counted worthy to receive the Divine fire at the dividing of tongues and for his fiery desire to please the One Who chose him took the place of the apostate.

21.21. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl; and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

"The twelve gates were constructed out of twelve whole pearls. 'The twelve gates,' says St. Andrew, 'are evidently the twelve disciples of Christ through whom we have come to know the Door and the Way of Life.' They are twelve pearls insofar as they receive light and brilliance from the single much-prized pearl - Christ. The street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. All these details express one and the same thought, that in the heavenly Church of God all is holy, pure, beautiful and firm, all majestic, spiritual and precious.

21.22-27. And I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

"Surely here," says St. Gregory Palamas, "he is also pointing us towards Jesus divinely transfigured on Tabor, Whose light is His Body, and Who, instead of daylight, has the glory of divinity as revealed on the mountain to those who came to him."[456]

"Further on the inner existence of the inhabitants of this wonderful heavenly city is described. First, there is no visible church of any kind, for **the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it**. There the Lord God will be given unceasing worship, and for that reason there will be need neither of a material temple nor of rites and priestly actions. Secondly, this heavenly city will not need any light, **for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof** - 'where there is the noetic Sun of righteousness, there is no need of a sensory one' (St. Andrew). Thirdly, the population of this heavenly city will be very varied and mixed, for 'all those who have been crowned with victory over the passions will bring into it the glory and honour of good works' (St. Andrew). Fourthly, the gates of the heavenly city will not be shut by day, and there will be no night there (cf. Isaiah 60.11). This means that the heavenly Church will be threatened by no danger or invasion of enemies. A general inner sign distinguishing this heavenly Church from the earthly is the fact that while in the earthly Church good co-exists with evil, and tares grow together with the wheat, in the heavenly Church there will be gathered from all the nations only that which is good, pure and holy.

[456] St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 34,* 15.

Everything that is evil, defiled and unclean and has accumulated throughout the whole period of the world's history will be removed and washed away as it were into a stinking reservoir, whose impurity will not touch this wonderful habitation that accomodates only the blessed." (Archbishop Averky)

And the gates shall be opened continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; to bring in to thee the power of the Gentiles, and their kings as captives (Isaiah 60.11).

22.1-5. And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign to the ages of ages.

"What light is this, in which there is no variableness nor shadow of turning (James1.17)? What is this unchangeable and never-setting light? Is it not the Divine Light?"[457]

Paradise was removed from the earth because of the sin of man; but in the new heaven and new earth it will be restored to earth with, and in, the New Jerusalem.

"The uninterruptedness of the blessedness of the members of the heavenly Church is depicted in a series of symbols. The first symbol is the **clear as crystal, pure river of water of life**. This river, uninterruptedly streaming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, symbolically represents the grace of the life-creating Spirit that fills the stones of the holy city, i.e. the whole multitude of its inhabitants, who are **multiplied**, according to the Psalmist, **more than the sand** (Psalm 138.18). This is the grace and mercy of God, which will inexhaustibly stream onto the inhabitants of the heavenly city, filling their hearts with ineffable blessedness (cf. Isaiah 35.9-10). The second symbol is the **tree of life**, similar to that which was once in the earthly paradise, before the fall into sin of the forefathers. The **tree of life** in the heavenly Jerusalem will possess certain very exceptional qualities: twelve times in the year it will

[457] St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 34,* 15. "Palamas also identifies the Light of Tabor with the very first light which shone forth (Genesis 1.3-5) and proceeds to compare it with the light of the sun. There was a time, he says, when the sun's light was not, and the light that was made to shine was clearly not, as we now see it, in the shape of a disc. The first is the progenitor or original light (protogonon), while the second, says St. Gregory, is that physical light which was brought intoexistence on the fourth day of creation" (Christopher Veniamin, *The Orthodox Understanding of Salvation*, Dalton, Pa.: Mount Thabor Publishing, 2014, pp. 70-171).

produce fruits, and its leaves will serve for the healing of the nations. St. Andrew considers that 'the tree of life means Christ... Through Him and the twelve fruits of the apostolic band we are given the unfailing fruit of Divine knowledge. The leaves of the tree of life, that is, Christ, signify the subtlest, most exalted and most radiant understanding of the Divine judgements, while its fruits are the most perfect knowledge, which is revealed in the age to come. These leaves will be for the healing, that is, the cleansing of the ignorance of the nations which are lower than the others in the perfections of the virtues. Since **there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars** (I Corinthians 15.41), and **the Father has many mansions** (John 14.2), according to their nature the works of one will be worthy of lesser, of another - of greater radiance.' **And there shall be no more curse** - every curse will be forever taken away from the inhabitants of the heavenly city, **and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads**. Those counted worthy of becoming inhabitants of this city will see God face to face, 'not in enigmas, but, as the great Dionysius witnesses, in the same form in which He was seen by the holy apostles on the holy mountain. Instead of the gold plate which the ancient high-priest wore (Exodus 28.32), they will have the name of God engraved, not on their foreheads, but on their hearts, that is, firm, immutable, and daring love for Him. For the engraving on the forehead signifies the adornment of daring.' (St. Andrew) **And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign to the ages of ages.** All these traits indicate the uninterrupted and fullest communion of the members of the heavenly Church with their Master, which is even combined with the contemplation of His face. This will be for them a fount of ineffable blessedness (cf. Ezekiel 47.12)." (Archbishop Averky)

For these their waters come forth from the sanctuary; and their fruit shall be for meat, and their foliage for health (Ezekiel 47.12).

"In the New Jerusalem there will not be any anathema. This can be understood in two ways, giving the word anathema both meanings: (1) there will not be any lifting up to the judgement of God, for this judgement has already been accomplished; (2) there will not be any special dedication to God, for all things will be the holy things of God, just as the light of God enlightens all."[458]

There shall be no more a Canaanite in the House of the Lord in that day (Zechariah 14.21).

For this shall be the law of the House: upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the House (Ezekiel 43.12).

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[458] St. John Mzximovich, "The Word 'Anathema' and its Meaning".

When He shall be revealed we shall be like unto Him, for we shall see Him as He is (I John 3.2).

22.6-9. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the spirits of the prophets sent His angel to shew unto His servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

In a Homily for the Feast of the Synaxis of the Holy Angels we read: "The Holy Church, which rejects the impious worship of angels devised by idolaters and heretics of old, has received from the divinely inspired Fathers the tradition of celebrating with reverence the Synaxis of the Holy Angels. In the days of the Old Testament, the people of God, having fallen away from their Creator, began to worship that which the Lord created. They made idols after the likeness of things visible, of that which is in heaven above and and earth beneath, the work of their own hands. At that time, when the people offered oblations unto the sun, the moon, and the stars as gods, imagining that these possessed living souls, they also began to worship angels. The Book of Kings makes mention of this, saying that they **burned incense to Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the twelve signs of the Zodiac, and to all the host of heaven** (IV Kings 23.5, according to Jerome's translation), that is, to the angels; for the host of heaven is comprised of the angels, as is said in the Gospel: **And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host** (Luke 2.13).

"This impious worship of the angels spread through many lands in the days of the holy apostles. The holy Apostle Paul sought to root it out when he wrote to the Colossians, saying, **Let no man beguile you in voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head** (Colossians 2.18-19), which is Christ; for there were at that time certain heretics who made a show of humility but proudly imagined that they were like the angels because of their abstinence and the purity of their lives. These men taught that angels were to be worshipped in the same manner as God. After this, there arose other heretics who taught that the angels were the makers of the visible creation and that they are more honorable and exalted than Christ, the Son of God, since they are bodiless. These heretics called the Archangel Michael the God of the Hebrews. Finally, still others appeared, who devoted themselves to sorcery and deceived the people, calling upon the demons whom they served under the name of angels. This heresy grew especially strong in Colossae, a city under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan see of Laodicea, where many secretly worshipped the angels in an impious manner akin to idolatry. The local council of the holy fathers that met at

Laodicea [in 319] denounced this heresy, but while it anathematized and rejected the heretical worship of the holy angels, it decreed lawful the pious and proper veneration of the holy angels as God's servants and the guardians of the race of man, establishing the celebration of the festival held in their honor on this day [November 8]."[459]

In our days of Laodicean indifference to the faith, this Laodicean heresy has reappeared in the form of the worship both of the Archangel Michael and of Satan, and of false "Christs", "bishops", "elders" and "gurus" of all kinds.

22.10-11. And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand (Daniel 12.9-10).

Metropolitan Anastasius of New York writes: "The Lord sometimes waits for evil to reveal itself utterly, so that, having exposed its real nature, it might by itself be rejected by the hearts of men; and He subjects the righteous man to a sevenfold trial, so as to reveal his spiritual beauty before the whole world and increase his reward. Thus, for a time, He allows things to remain as they are: **He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still** (Revelation 22.11).

"If, with a righteous man, the least sinful obstacles characteristic of fallen human nautre are burned up in the fire of trials, so also does God allow the ungodly one to enjoy prosperity for a time, so that he might receive his "reward" for those crumbs of good which he might at any time do during his life. The just Judge does not wish to remain in debt either to the righteous or to the sinful. The latter, of course, do not realize that He is dealing with them in this instance as a physician does with the hopelessly ill, deciding at the last moment to let them have anything they want, only because they have no hope for a future. With great eloquence and persuasiveness the blessed Augustine reveals this latter idea in his famous work *On the City of God*, which is, as is well known, the first attempt at a philosophy of history, when he speaks of the fall of Rome. The very prosperity of those condemned to destruction is no more than a phantom, like smoke, and therefore it should elicit no sense of envy in anyone, but only a sad pity for their lot, for the divine Word is immutable: **Vengeance is Mine; I will repay** (Romans 9.13; Deuteronomy 32.35). **When I am given the appointed time, I will judge uprightly** (Psalm 74.3); **I will begin, and I will make an end** (I Kings 3.12).

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[459] St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, volume III, House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 1997, pp. 121-123.

"**Fret not thyself because of evil-doers** King David the prophet urges us, **nor envy them that work iniquity. For like grass quickly shall they be withered, and like green herbs quickly shall they fall away** (Psalm 36.1-2).

"'Weep for the sinner who succeeds at everything', one of the Fathers of the Church teaches us, "for the sword of divine justice is hanging over him.' When the Lord deems it necessary, He reveals His judgement over ungodliness even here on earth, answering, as it were, the entreaty of mankind: **Let me see Thy vengeance taken upon them, for to Thee I have declared my cause** (Jeremiah 11.2)."[460]

22.12-21. And behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give to every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints. Amen.

"In the concluding verses of the Apocalypse the holy Apostle John confirms the truth and faithfulness of all that has been said and speaks about the proximity of the fulfilment of all that has been shown to him, and also about the proximity of the Second Coming of Christ and with it the recompense that every man will receive in accordance with his works. **I come quickly** - these words, according to the explanation of St. Andrew, point either to the shortness of the present life by comparison with the future one, or to the suddenness and speed with which each man's end will come, since his passing hence constitutes for each man the end. But insofar as it is not known **in what hour the thief cometh**, we are commanded **to watch and have our loins girded and our lamps burning** (Luke 12.35). We must understand that for our God there is no time, that **one day is with Him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day** (II Peter 3.8). He will come **quickly**, because He absolutely will come - nothing will prevent His Coming, as nothing will prevent or destroy His unlying decisions and promises. A

[460] Metropolitan Anastasius, op. cit., p. 21

man reckons days, months and years, but the Lord does not count times, but the righteousness and unrighteousness of men, and according to the measure of His elect He measures the proximity of that great and radiant day, when **there shall be no more time**, and the unwaning Day of *His Kingdom* will begin. The Spirit and the bride, that is, the Church of Christ, call on everyone to come and draw the water of life freely, so that they may be counted worthy to become citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem." (Archbishop Averky)

The threat that **if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life** should be especially heeded by those contemporary heretics who deny the God-inspired nature of the Apocalypse. For it has, as Archbishop Averky says, "a great significance for the Church of all ages. It represents the natural completion of the canon of the sacred books. And in portraying the future and last judgements of the Church and the world it as it were places us directly in front of the face of the coming Judge..."

We end by giving glory to God and repeating the prayer of the Optina Fathers:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God! Deliver me from the seductions of the fast approaching Antichrist, who is evilly cunning and abominable to God. And deliver us from all his snares, and shelter our spiritual father (name), all of us, his spiritual children, and all the Christians who are close to us from his insidious nets in the secret desert of Thy salvation, and do not allow us, O Lord, to have the fear of the devil more than the fear of God, and do not let us fall away from Thee and Thy Holy Church, but grant us rather, O Lord, to suffer and die for Thy Holy Name and the Orthodox Faith, and not to deny Thee, and not to receive the seal of the accursed Antichrist, and not to worship him. Give us, O Lord, day and night, tears and weeping over our sins, and spare us, O Lord, in the day of Thy Terrible Judgement. Amen.

APPENDIX 1. GENETICS AND THE BIRTH OF THE ANTICHRIST

If the first half of the twentieth century was distinguished by an amazing increase in our knowledge of the physical world, the second half was distinguished by an even more amazing increase in our knowledge of the biological world, and especially the world of human genetics and human reproduction. The vital break-through here was the discovery of DNA in 1953. Then came the introduction of the contraceptive pill, in vitro fertilisation and surrogate motherhood. As one journalist put it: "First, contraception severed the connection between sex and reproduction. It became possible to have sex without having babies. Then modern technology severed the connection between reproduction and sex. It became possible to have babies without having sex."[461]

The most alarming developments have been genetic manipulation and cloning. Animal clones have been produced, and claims have even been made for a human clone.[462]

As early as 1976, the director of the Institute of Genetics of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Academician N.P. Dubinin, was predicting the scale of this revolution: "The achievements of human genetics, and of general and molecular genetics, will push forward the problem of interference in human heredity. The coming revolution in genetics will demand a decisive overturning of the previously dominant view concerning the primacy of nature in its natural form. Genetics will turn out to be capable of overcoming the natural story of life and creating organic forms inconceivable in the light of the laws of natural evolution… For the molecular genetics and the molecular biology of the 21st century there lies in store the prospect of creating cells as the only self-regulating open living system, which will be bound up with the understanding of the essence of life. An exchange of living forms will take place between the earth and other worlds… The aim of genetic engineering is the creation of organisms according to a given model, whose hereditary program is formed by means of introducing the recipient of new genetic information. This information can be artificially synthesised or separated in the form of natural genetic structures from various organisms. In this way a new single genetic system which cannot arise by means of natural evolution will be created experimentally… Various manipulations with DNA molecules can lead to the unforeseen creation of biologically dangerous hybrid forms… "[463]

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[461] Anthony Daniels, "How far has humanity sunk when we treat the creation of life just like ordering a new car?", *Daily Mail* (London), August 13, 2001, p. 12.

[462] David Fisher, "Russians 'have human clones'", *Metro* (London), August 13, 2001, p. 4.

[463] Dubinin, *General Genetics*, Moscow: Nauka, 1976; quoted by Protopriest Vladislav Sveshnikov, "The work of hell is being done already", *Kontinent*, 71, 1992, pp. 270-271. Italics mine (V.M.)

After quoting this passage, Fr. Vladislav Sveshnikov expressed the truly apocalyptic fear: **"We have to admit that contemporary science is preparing the ground for the coming of the Antichrist."**[464] How? By the manipulation of genes in order to produce the "superman" or "man-god" of Nietzsche's imagination, who will be at the same time the "devil-man" or "Antichrist" of Christian patristic teaching.

The purpose of this article is to show the light shed by the Holy Fathers on this possible link between genetic science and the birth of the Antichrist, and also on what may be meant by Dubinin's words: **"An exchange of living forms will take place between the earth and other worlds…"**

1. Man, not demon

The birth of the Antichrist is described by the Fathers as being from an unclean woman of the tribe of Dan. This is the teaching of St. Irenaeus of Lyons[465], St. Hippolytus of Rome[466], St. Hilary of Poitiers, St. Ambrose of Milan and Blessed Jerome[467] in the West, and of St. Narses of Armenia[468], St. John Chrysostom[469], Blessed Theodoretus of Cyr[470] and St. John of Damascus[471] in the East. In the *Synaxarion* for Meatfare Sunday, the Sunday of the Last Judgement, we read: "The Antichrist will come and be born, as St. Hippolytus of Rome says, of a polluted woman, a supposed virgin, a Jewess of the tribe of Dan".[472]

The most detailed description of this tradition is to be found in St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher of Mount Athos (+1596): "The Antichrist will be born of an unclean, wanton maid. All debaucheries will be united within this maid, and

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[464] Sveshnikov, op. cit., p. 271.

[465] "Receiving all the power of the devil,… summing up within himself the apostasy of the devil" (*Against Heresies*, V, 25, 1).

[466] "Just as the Saviour appeared in the form of a man, so he too [the Antichrist] will come in the form of a man" (*Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 6).

[467] "Nor let us think that he [the Antichrist] is the devil or a demon, but a man in whom satan is to dwell wholly and bodily" (*On Daniel* 7.8).

[468] "Think ye not that he is Satan, or a devil from among his hosts. No, but a man lost in mind and soul of the tribe of Dan." (In W. Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend,* Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999, 254).

[469] "Who is he? Is he Satan? By no means, but some man, who allows him to work fully in him. For he is a man... He will not introduce idolatry, but will be a kind of opponent to God; he will abolish all the gods, and will order men to worship him instead of God, and he will be seated in the temple of God, not only the one in Jerusalem, but also in every church..." (*Homily 3 on II Thessalonians*).

[470] "Before Christ's Coming there shall appear in the world the enemy of man, the opponent of God, vested in human nature." (*A Short Exposition of the Divine Dogmas*, 23).

[471] "The devil himself does not become man in the way that the Lord was made man. God forbid! But he becomes man as the offspring of fornication and receiveth all the energy of Satan. For God, knowing the strangeness of the choice that he would make, allows the devil to take up his abode in him. Born of a fornicator, he shall be raised in secret, shall be announced to all unexpectedly, and will ascend the throne." (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, IV, 26).

[472] *Lenten Triodion*, Moscow: Synodal Press, 1897, pp. 30b-31a.

she will be the treasure house of fornication. Every evil of the world, every uncleanness, every sin will be embodied in her. Through her conceiving from secret wantonness, all sins will be combined in a womb of uncleanness and will be brought to life together with the spiritual impoverishment of the world. When the world will be deprived of the grace of the Most Holy Spirit, then the Antichrist will come to life in the womb of the unclean, from the most filthy and impure woman to have lived, though she will appear as a virgin. Conceived from such secret and unnatural wantonness, the offspring will be the container of every evil, as opposed to the way in which Christ was the ideal of every good quality, and His Most Pure Mother was the ideal of womanhood."[473]

The question is: who will be the father? Since the Antichrist will attempt to imitate Christ in all things, it has been suggested by some of the Fathers that he will try to imitate Him also in His birth. Thus just as Christ was born of the Virgin, so the Antichrist will be born of a supposed virgin; and just as Christ had no human father, but was conceived of the Holy Spirit, so the Antichrist will have no human father, but will be conceived of - the devil? Such an idea *appears* to have been suggested by the further words of St. Nilus: "Yea, he will be born of seed, but without man's sowing. He will be born with seed, but not with the seed of a man." And some expressions from some early Western Fathers might seem to encourage this hypothesis. Thus both St. Constantine's tutor, Lactantius[474]and St. Martin of Tours[475] say that the Antichrist will be "conceived by an evil spirit", while Ambrosiaster (probably a fourth-century Roman) writes: "As the Son of God in His human birth manifested His Divine nature, so also shall Satan appear in human form."[476] In fact, Bousset claims that "the tradition wavers between the concept of the Antichrist as of a man controlled by the devil and that of his identification with Satan."[477]

However, this is an exaggeration. The consensus of the Fathers rules out a real incarnation of the devil in a man. Nevertheless, the Fathers do not deny that the devil will *try* to incarnate himself in a man in imitation of Christ's Incarnation. Thus Blessed Theodoretus of Cyrus writes: "The persecutor of men imitates the incarnation of our God and Saviour. And as He by assuming our human nature accomplished our salvation, so he [the devil], by choosing a man capable of receiving the fulness of his power, shall tempt man."[478]

And in the middle of the tenth century, the French Abbot Adso of Montier-en-Der developed this idea as follows: "He is born by intercourse from a father and a mother, like other men - not, as some fantasize, from a virgin

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[473] St. Nilus, in Archimandrite Panteleimon, *A Ray of Light*, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1976, p. 76.
[474] Lactantius, *The Divine Statutes*, VII, 17.
[475] St. Martin, in Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogue*, II, 14. Cf. Prosper of Aquitaine, *On the Promises and Predictions of God,* IV, 8.
[476] Ambrosiaster, *On II Thessalonians,* ii, 2; in Bousset, op. cit., p. 142.
[477] Bousset, op. cit., p. 142.
[478] Blessed Theodoretus, *On II Thessalonians* 2.3.

alone... But in the very beginning of his conception the devil will at the same time enter into the womb of his mother and will totally fill her, and totally circumscribe her, and totally hold her, and totally possess her from without and within, so that she will conceive through a man with the devil's cooperation, and that which will be born will be totally iniquitous, totally evil and totally lost..."[479]

2. Can demons unite with men?

Further light has been shed on this mystery by St. Seraphim of Sarov, who said: "Jesus Christ, the true God-Man, the Son of God the Father, was born in Israel by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the true Antichrist, the devil-man, will be born amidst the Russians. He will be the son of a fornicating woman of the tribe of Dan and the son of the devil through the artificial transfer to her of the seed of the man, with which the spirit of darkness will settle in her womb. But one of the Russians who will live to the time of the birth of the Antichrist (like Simeon the God-receiver, who announced the birth of the Child Jesus to the world) will curse the newborn babe and will announce to the world that it is the true Antichrist."[480]

So here we find a new twist, as it were, to what we might have been tempted to dismiss as the myth of the devil-man. The Antichrist will be truly man - on both his father's and his mother's side. But the fallen angelic nature will also be innate in him, being mixed with his father's seed even before his conception. At the same time, we may suppose, genetic engineering will take place on the seed, so as to make the child born of it the most brilliant and talented, but at the same time most corrupted person ever born! How costly for mankind is the transgressing of God's laws concerning marriage and the begetting of children - nothing less than the birth of the Antichrist!

Perhaps we can now better understand an apparent ambiguity in St. Andrew of Caesarea's *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, in which he at one moment asserts that the "angelic substance" is assumed in the Antichrist (50.13), and at another that "the devil operates in the Antichrist" (51.45). There *is* a sense in which the "angelic substance" is assumed in the Antichrist, since it is joined to him from his very conception, and therefore influences him from within and from the beginning, rather than possessing him from without and ex post facto. On the other hand, it is not a real incarnation of the devil, nor a real imitation of the Virgin Birth, since neither is his mother a virgin, nor is he without a human father. It is not, as Ambrosiaster puts it, that "as the Son of God in His human birth manifested His Divine nature, so also shall Satan appear in human form".[481] It is rather, as St. Cyril of Jerusalem

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[479] Adso, *Libellus de Antichristo*, 1292B.
[480] St. Seraphim, text supplied by Fr. Victor Potapov; a variant was published in *Liternaturnaya Ucheba*, January-February, 1991, pp. 131-134.
[481] Ambrosiaster, *On II Thessalonians* 2.3.

puts it, "Satan uses him as an organ, working in his own person through him".[482]

But is it in principle possible for the human and angelic natures to unite, not merely through possession, that is, the union of two persons, one human and the other angelic (demonic) under one skin, but *hypostatically*, through the union of two *natures*, one human and the other angelic, in one *person*?

This question was actively discussed by the Fathers in relation to one of the most puzzling passages in Holy Scripture: **And it came to pass when men began to be numerous upon the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the angels of God [or: sons of God], having seen the daughters of men that they were beautiful, took for themselves wives from all whom they chose. And the Lord God said, My Spirit shall certainly not remain among these men for ever, for they are flesh, but their days shall be one hundred and twenty years. Now the giants were upon the earth in those days, and after that the angels of God [sons of God] were wont to enter in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the giants of old, the men of renown.** (Genesis 6.1-5).

The understanding of this passage hinges on the meaning of the word translated "angels of God" or "sons of God" in verses 2 and 4. In the Hebrew Massoretic text the word is bene-ha-elohim, literally "sons of God". In the Greek translation of the Septuagint, which is the oldest and most authoritative text that we have, the Cambridge text edited by Brooke-Maclean has "angels of God" (αγγελοι του θεου) in verse 2, and "sons of God" (υιοι του θεου) in verse 4.

P. S. Alexander writes: "The translator has not been inconsistent, for closer inspection shows that, though there are no significant variants at verse 4, a number of important witnesses at verse 2 read, not οι αγγελοι του θεου but οι υιοι του θεου. Moreover, the main support in verse 2 for οι αγγελοι του θεου (viz. Cod. A) has the reading over an erasure. It seems most likely, then, that LXX [the Septuagint] originally read οι υιοι του θεου in both places. It was later altered, but inconsistently. The literal rendering [i.e. "sons of God"] is found in other Greek texts, as well as in the Vulgate, the Peshitta and the Biblical text of the *Ps-Philonic Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (=LAB)."[483]

Be that as it may, and even if there is not absolute unanimity concerning which reading is correct, there is complete unanimity, from the earliest Jewish commentators until the early third century, about its meaning. All commentators and writers agree that the reference here is to *angels*. Such an interpretation is supported by the fact that in three passages of the Book of Job (1.6, 2.1, 38.7) the phrase "sons of God" certainly refers to angels. Also, the

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[482] St. Cyril, *Catechetical Discourses* XV,14.

[483] Alexander, "The Targumim and Early Exegesis of 'Sons of God' in Genesis 6", *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 1972, 23, pp. 60-71.

fact that the women gave birth to *giants*[484] suggests something abnormal, something more than just a normal human coupling….

We find this interpretation both in pre-Christian Jewish literature - for example, *The Book of Enoch, Jubilees, The Testament of the 12 Patriarchs*, Philo and Josephus - and in the early Christian Fathers and writers such as Justin the Philosopher, Irenaeus, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Methodius of Olympus and Ambrose.

Thus Josephus writes: "Now this posterity of Seth continued to esteem God as the Lord of the universe, and to have an entire regard to virtue, for seven generations; but in process of time they were perverted, and forsook the practices of their forefathers, and did neither pay those honours to God which were appointed them, not had they any concern to do justice towards men; but for what degree of zeal they had formerly shown for virtue, they now showed by their actions a double degree of wickedness, whereby they made God to be their enemy. *For many angels of God accompanied with women, and begat sons* that proved unjust, and despisers of all that was good, on account of the confidence they had in their own strength; for the tradition is, that these men did what resembled the acts of those whom the Grecians call giants. But Noah was very uneasy at what they did; and being displeased at their conduct, persuaded them to change their disposition, and their actions for the better: but seeing they did not yield to him, but were slaves to wicked pleasures, he was afraid they would kill him, together with his wife and children, and those they had married; so he departed out of the land."[485]

Again, St. Justin writes: "In ancient times wicked demons appeared and defiled women."[486]

Again, St. Methodius writes: "The others remained in the positions for which God made and appointed them; but the devil was insolent, and having conceived envy of us, behaved wickedly in the charge committed to him; as also did those who subsequently were enamoured of fleshly charms, and had illicit intercourse with the daughters of men. For to them also, as was the case with men, God granted the possession of their own choice."[487]

Again, St. Irenaeus writes: "And for a very long while wickedness extended and spread, and reached and laid hold upon the whole race of mankind, until a very small seed of righteousness remained among them: and illicit unions took place upon the earth, since angels were united with the daughters of the race of mankind; and they bore to them sons who for their exceeding greatness were called giants. And the angels brought as presents to their wives teachings of wickedness, in that they brought them the virtues of

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[484] These "giants" are also referred to in Baruch 3.26-28; Sirach 16.7; Wisdom 14.6; Judith 16.7.
[485] Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, I, 3.
[486] St. Justin, *First Apology* V, 2.
[487] St. Methodius, *Discourse on the Resurrection*, 7.

roots and herbs, and dyeing in colours and cosmetics, the discovery of rare substances, love-potions, aversions, amours, concupiscence, constraints of love, spells of bewitchment, and all sorcery and idolatry hateful to God; by the entry of which things into the world evil extended and spread, while righteousness was diminished and enfeebled…"[488]

Another very important, albeit not quite so clear witness in favour of this interpretation is the passage from II Peter: **If God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into tartarus, and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgement; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah...** (2.4-5; cf. Jude 6), which from its context seems to be referring to the angels' cohabitation with the daughters of men.

However, in spite of all these early witnesses, the later Fathers from about the second half of the fourth century - including John Chrysostom, Ephraim the Syrian, Blessed Theodoretus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Blessed Jerome and Blessed Augustine - turned sharply against this interpretation, choosing rather to understand the term "sons of God" as denoting the men of the line of Seth, and the "daughters of men" - the women of the line of Cain; so that the event described in Genesis 6 involved an unlawful mixing between the pious and the impious human generations.

Thus St. John Chrysostom writes that it would be "folly to accept such insane blasphemy, saying that an incorporeal and spiritual nature could have united itself to human bodies".[489]

Again, St. Augustine, after noting that "the Septuagint calls them the angels and sons of God", goes on to say: "According to the Hebrew canonical Scriptures [i.e as opposed to apocrypha such as The Book of Enoch], there is no doubt that there were giants upon the earth before the deluge, and that they were the sons of the men of earth, and citizens of the carnal city, unto which the sons of God, being Seth's in the flesh, forsaking righteousness, adjoined themselves."[490]

Again, St. Ephraim the Syrian writes: "The daughters of Cain adorned themselves and became a snare to the eyes of the sons of Seth… The entire tribe of Seth… was stirred to a frenzy over them… Because the sons of Seth were going in to the daughters of Cain, they turned away from their first wives whom they had previously taken. Then these wives, too, disdained their own continence and now, because of their husbands, quickly began to abandon their modesty, which up until that time they had preserved for their husbands' sake. It is because of this wantonness that assailed both the men and the women that Scripture says, **All flesh had corrupted its way** (6.13)."[491]

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[488] St. Irenaeus, *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 18.
[489] St. Chrysostom, *On Genesis* 5:136-7.
[490] St. Augustine, *The City of God,* XV, 23.
[491] St. Ephraim, *Commentary on Genesis*, 6.3. Quoted in Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 2000, p. 244.

To this same line of interpretation belong the words of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow: "According to the text of the Alexandrian Bible, [the words are] 'Angels of God'. Lactantius is of this opinion, as are many ancient authors. Justin affirms that from the marriages of Angels with the daughters of men there came demons. Athenagoras ascribes the fall of the Angels to these same marriages, and it was from them that the giants came. Tertullian ascribes to these Angels the acquisition of Astrology, precious stones, metals and some female adornments. But all these traditions contradict the witness of Jesus Christ, that **the Angels do not marry** (Matthew 22.30)…

"According to the opinion of the most recent interpreters, [they are] the descendants of the race *of Shem*, who not only were *sons of God by grace* (cf. Deuteronomy 14.1; I John 3.1), but they also probably formed a society under this name (cf. Genesis 4.26)[492] which was opposed to the society of *the sons of men*, that is, the descendants *of Cain*, who were led only by their fallen human nature. Moses ascribes the beginning of the mixing of such contrary societies to the fascination with the *beauty* of the daughters of men; and as a consequence even those who belonged to the society of those who walk in the Spirit became **flesh**, and light itself began to be turned into darkness."[493]

3. Demons, Women and UFOs

However, even if we exclude the possibility of a *real, hypostatic* union between angels (demons) and men, it is another question whether demons may not *desire* such a union and *strive* for it.

But why should they wish to unite with women?

First, because demons, in spite of their bodiless nature, are possessed by bodily lust, according to St. Ignatius Brianchaninov.[494] In this connection the words of the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 11.10 are relevant: **For this cause ought the woman to have authority on her head on account of the angels**. Commenting on this passage, St. Paulinus of Nola writes: "Let them realize why Paul ordered their heads to be clothed with a more abundant covering: it is because of the angels, that is, the angels who are ready to seduce them and whom the saints will condemn."[495]

A second reason is that Satan almost certainly wishes to imitate the union of the two natures in one Person which Christ achieved at His incarnation, only substituting the demonic nature for the Divine, a whore for the Virgin Mother of God, and the Antichrist for Christ. Such a motive is suggested by

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[492] According to Aquila's translation, this verse reads: "Then they began to be called by the name of the Lord" – that is, "sons of God". Cf. Metropolitan Philaret, *Notes leading to a fundamental understanding of the Book of Genesis*, Moscow, 1867, p. 100 (in Russian).

[493] Metropolitan Philaret, *Notes,* op. cit., p. 108.

[494] Bishop Ignatius, "On Orthodoxy".

[495] St. Paulinus, *Letter 23: To Severus*.

the fact, emphasised by many of the Fathers, that the Antichrist will seek to imitate Christ in all things. And if in all things, why not in his very birth?

Let us recall the prophecies of Saints Nilus and Seraphim that the conception of the Antichrist will be through a technique of artificial insemination, whereby the devil will seize and possess the sperm before it has reached the mother's egg. Since the technique will be artificial insemination, rather than the normal process of sexual intercourse, the mother will be able to claim – falsely, of course - that she is a "virgin". And since artificial insemination takes place in a test-tube, outside both human bodies, the possibilities for possession and genetic manipulation of the sperm by the devil will be maximised. Moreover, having taking possession of the sperm before it fertilises the egg, the devil will be able to claim that he is the father of the Antichrist "from eternity" – or, at any rate, before the human father could beget him. Then the Antichrist will be, according to the demonic anti-theology, one person in two natures – from a bodiless father before he became man, and from a virgin mother at the moment of conception…

Could the demons already be experimenting on the union of the human and demonic natures? After all, the technique of artificial insemination already exists. Moreover, "genetic engineering", and the union of human and animal species, is already well advanced in human laboratories - undoubtedly under the direct influence of demons.

But the participation of demons may be more direct that that; for it is not just deluded human beings who are attempting to change and manipulate and hybridise the nature of man...

According to reputable Orthodox writers, such as Hieromonk Seraphim Rose, the inhabitants of the so-called "Unidentified Flying Objects" (UFOs), which have so struck the popular imagination in recent decades, are in fact demons.[496]

Other writers have seen a parallel between the phenomenon of the UFOs coming to earth and the story of the visitation of the daughters of men by the sons of God in Genesis 6, which produced the hybrid offspring of the "giants", "watchers" or "fallen ones".[497] Moreover, according to the Harvard Professor of Psychiatry, John Mack, there is now well established evidence that men and women have been abducted onto UFOs, where their alien "hosts", i.e. demons, have performed sexual experiments upon them. There have been reported cases of matings between demons and human beings on board these craft. But still more sinister, sperm has been taken from men, and ova from women. "Fertilized eggs, which may have been genetically altered, are

[496] Rose, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1990, chapter 6. See also David Ritchie, "UFOs: The Demonic Connection", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 43, no. 2, March-April, 1993, pp. 18-37; Archbishop Chrysostomos, "Alien Abductions and the Orthodox Christian", *Orthodox Tradition*, vol. XIV, 1997, pp. 57-62.
[497] See Andrew Collins, *From the Ashes of the Angels*, London: Penguin Books, 1997, p. 371.

implanted, and later there is the eventual removal of the pregnancy. In subsequent abductions, experiencers are shown hybrid offspring and may even be asked to hold or nurture them."[498]

These ideas indicate how Genesis 6.1-5, modern experiments on human sexuality and reproduction (by both humans and demons) and the doctrine of the Antichrist, may come together in a fantastic, nightmarish scenario that nevertheless has the stamp of reality. Moved by envy, lust and jealousy, the devil, the enemy of mankind, has from primordial times tried to interfere with, corrupt, abuse and radically subvert human nature. And just as Christ recreated human nature in the image and likeness of God by becoming incarnate of the Virgin Mother of God, so the devil wishes to recreate it in *his* image and likeness by becoming incarnate of a pseudo-virgin, the mother of the Antichrist.

However, *real* demonic incarnation, the creation of a true demon-man, is impossible because of the bounds between species and kinds of rational beings created by God. So Satan resorts to as close an imitation as possible: through the demonic possession of human seed even before conception, and its genetic manipulation to accentuate the worst qualities in fallen human nature, he plans to create, if not a true demon-man, at any rate the demonic man par excellence. But since, unlike God, he cannot create out of nothing or at once, he requires time and experimentation, in order gradually, by trial and error, to "work out" his perverted masterpiece.

Let us go back to the early chapters of Genesis. It will be recalled that almost immediately after the attempt of the "sons of God" to seduce the daughters of men, and the birth from these unions of giants, there came the universal flood which swept away all mankind except Noah and his family. Whether or not there is a direct causal connection between the two events is not indicated: but their close proximity is very suggestive.

Now in the New Testament the Lord said: **As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all** (Luke 17.26-27). The period we are living through now appears very similar to the period the Lord was speaking about, and so also to the period just before the Flood. Now, as then, men have begun to multiply on the earth, and now, as then, the condition of mankind is one of spiritual and moral degeneration.

But could the correspondence between the Old and the New Testaments be even closer here? Could it be that just as the universal flood and the destruction of the old world was brought about by an unnatural union of demons and men and the consequent birth of giants, so the Second Coming of Christ and the burning up of the material universe at His Coming will be

[498] Mack, *Abduction*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994, p. 394.

brought about by an unnatural union of Satan and a woman and the consequent birth of the Antichrist? Could it be that the final corruption of human nature which both sequences indicate signals the end of the world in both sequences, with only a tiny remnant of righteous men being saved in the Ark (of the Church)?

We cannot prevent the birth of the Antichrist, **for the Scriptures must be fulfilled** (Mark 14.49). But we can delay his appearing by living a godly life and by being keenly aware, through a knowledge of the Scriptures, of the snares of the devil. And we must be aware above all that the human spirit, being free and under the protection of God for as long as it seeks it, is not subject to the flesh, however corrupted, manipulated and even demon-possessed it may be. The Lord said of the last times: **except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved** (Matthew 24.22). But He also said of His sheep: **They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand** (John 10.28)...

(published in Russian in *Vernost'*, no. 75, 2007)

APPENDIX 2. THE SEAL OF THE ANTICHRIST IN SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

The judgement of God is being carried out on the Church and the people of Russia…
A selection is being made of those true warriors of Christ who alone will be able…
to resist the Beast himself.
Hieromartyr Damascene, Bishop of Glukhov.

He causes all… to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads,
And that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast
or the number of his name…
Revelation 13.16-17.

Introduction

The year 1917 marked the beginning of the time of the end, the time of the Antichrist, according to the prophecies of such luminaries of the Church as St. Seraphim of Sarov, St. Ambrose of Optina, Bishop Theophanes the Recluse, St. John of Kronstadt and the holy new martyrs and confessors of Russia. On November 9, 1917, Divine Providence drew the attention of all those with eyes to see the signs of the times to an extraordinary "coincidence": in one column of newsprint in the London *Times*, there appeared two articles, the one announcing the outbreak of revolution in Petrograd, and the other – the promise of a homeland for the Jews in Palestine (the Balfour declaration). Thus at precisely the same time the two horns of the beast of the last times, the power of apostate Jewry, appeared above the vast sea of the formerly Christian world: the anti-theist, materialist horn of Soviet power, and the theist, Judaistic horn of Zionist Israel.

The fall of Russia, the last Orthodox Christian empire, was followed by further blows to the monarchical, God-established principle of political government. In 1918 the Catholic empire of Austro-Hungary and the Protestant empire of Germany collapsed. In 1924 the Orthodox kingdom of Greece fell; and in 1941 and 1944 the last Orthodox monarchies of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria also fell. By the end of the Second World War there were no real monarchies left in Europe or America, and the world was dominated by two powers based on the anti-monarchical, democratic principle: the United States of America, representing the more individualist, tolerant variety of democratism, and the Soviet Union, representing the more collectivist, intolerant variety.

50 years later, the situation had changed again. The Soviet Union was no more, and its rival for leadership of the communist world, China, was well on the way to transforming itself into a capitalist democracy. With the fall of the anti-theist, materialist horn of the beast, the attention of many Orthodox was turned to the other, theist horn – Israel, founded in 1948 under the sponsorship of Britain and the Soviet Union, and to Israel's allies (or

"colonies", as some asserted) in the West, especially America, the only remaining superpower. In particular, alarm was aroused by the spread throughout the West, and thence into the East, of new forms of identification and money exchange – credit cards, bar-codes, 18-figure identity cards, etc. – which appeared to contain the number of the beast, 666. The question raised in many minds, and addressed in the present article, is: could this be the seal of the Antichrist?

1. Authorities and anti-authorities

Let us begin by studying the reign of the Antichrist since 1917. In what does it consist? What are its essential characteristics?

According to the holy apostles and fathers of the Church, the reign of the Antichrist will be characterised by an extreme form of *anarchy* – that is, the absence of law and order. Now the origin of all law and order is God, so all law and order, all true authority, is established by God. That is the meaning of the apostle's famous saying: "There is no power that is not of God; the powers that be are established by God" (Romans 13.1). Christians honour the king and pray for the powers that be precisely in order to avoid the great evil of anarchy, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (I Timothy 2.2). Since anarchy is opposed to God-established authority, it is opposed to God, and must therefore itself be opposed by all those who fear God and obey His holy will.

A ruler may be unjust and cruel, but as long as he prevents anarchy Christians must obey him. Thus St. Irenaeus of Lyons writes: "Some rulers are given by God with a view to the improvement and benefit of their subjects and the preservation of justice; others are given with a view to producing fear, punishment and reproof; yet others are given with a view to displaying mockery, insult and pride – in each case in accordance with the deserts of the subjects. Thus… God's judgement falls equally on all men."[499] Again, St. Isidore of Pelusium writes that the evil ruler "has been allowed to spew out this evil, like Pharaoh, and, in such an instance, to carry out extreme punishment or to chastise those for whom great cruelty is required, as when the king of Babylon chastised the Jews."[500]

But there is line beyond which an evil ruler ceases to be a ruler and becomes an anti-ruler, an unlawful tyrant, who is not to be obeyed. Thus the Jews were commanded by God through the Prophet Jeremiah to submit to the king of Babylon, evil though he was; whereas they were commanded through another prophet, Moses, to resist and flee from the Egyptian Pharaoh, and rebelled again, with God's blessing, under Antiochus Epiphanes. For in the

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[499] St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, v, 24, 3; translated in Maurice Wiles & Mark Santer, *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 226.
[500] St. Isidore, *Letter 6*, quoted in *Selected Letters of Archbishop Theophan of Poltava*, Liberty, TN: St. John of Kronstadt Press, 1989, p. 36.

one case the authority, though evil, was still an authority, which it was beneficial to obey; whereas in the other cases the authority was in fact an anti-authority, obedience to which would have taken the people further away from God.

Anarchy, the absence of true authority, can be of two kinds: organised and disorganised. When a true authority collapses, there usually follows a period of disorganised anarchy, which is characterised by individual crimes of all kinds – murder, robbery, rape, sacrilege, - that go unchecked and unpunished because of the absence of a true power. Such was the period of Russian history that followed the collapse of the Orthodox empire in February, 1917. The Provisional government, having itself contributed to the collapse of the empire, and having received its authority neither (through holy anointing) from God nor (by means of a popular vote) from men, was unable to check the rising tide of anarchy and collapsed ignominiously. The disorganised anarchy of the Provisional government was followed by the organised anarchy of the Bolshevik "government"…

This was foreseen by many prophets. And it was revealed that the coming period would be the beginning of the last times when it would be necessary to suffer in order not to receive the seal of the Antichrist. Thus on February 21, 1917, a 14-year-old Kievan novice, Olga Zosimovna Boiko, fell into a deep trance which lasted for exactly forty days and during which many mysteries were revealed to her. One of these was the coming abdication of the Tsar. And she saw the following: "In blinding light on an indescribably wonderful throne sat the Saviour, and next to Him on His right hand – our sovereign, surrounded by angels. His Majesty was in full royal regalia: a radiant white robe, a crown, with a sceptre in his hand. And I heard the martyrs talking amongst themselves, rejoicing that the last times had come and that their number would be increased.

"They said that they would be tormented for the name of Christ and for refusing to accept the seal [of the Antichrist], and that the churches and monasteries would soon be destroyed, and those living in the monasteries would be driven out, and that not only the clergy and monastics would be tortured, but also all those who did not want to receive 'the seal' and would stand for the name of Christ, for the Faith and the Church."[501]

Now Christians are obliged to recognise every power that is in fact a power in the apostolic meaning of the word – that is, which at least tries to prevent anarchy by rewarding the good and punishing the bad (Romans 13.3; I Peter 2.14). Such a power does not have to be Christian: although only the Orthodox anointed kings, working together with the Orthodox hierarchs, are able to establish God's order in anything approaching fullness, even pagan,

[501] Letter of Sergius Nilus to Hierodeacon Zosimas, 6 August, 1917; in Vladimir Gubanov, *Tsar' Nikolai II-ij i Novie Mucheniki (Tsar Nicholas II and the New Martyrs)*, St. Petersburg, 2000, p. 121 (in Russian)l

heretical and Muslim states punish those crimes that are recognised as such by the vast majority of mankind, and are therefore recognised as legitimate by the Church. However, such recognition can only be relative – relative, that is, to the degree to which the government does in fact establish order, - and in extreme cases can be refused altogether.

Thus in the fourth century, the Persian King Sapor proposed to Hieromartyr Simeon, Bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, that he worship the sun, in exchange for which he would receive every possible honour and gift. But if he refused, this would bring about the complete destruction of Christianity in Persia. Now already before he had made this proposal to Simeon, King Sapor had started to kill the clergy, confiscate church property and raze the churches to the ground. So when he was brought before the king for his reply, St. Simeon not only refused to worship the sun but also, upon entering, refused to recognise the king by bowing. This omission of his previous respect for the king's authority was noticed and questioned by the King. St. Simeon replied: "Before I bowed down to you, giving you honour as a king, but now I come being brought to deny my God and Faith. It is not good for me to bow before an enemy of my God!"[502]

Again, when Julian the Apostate (361-363) came to the throne, the Church refused to recognize him. Thus St. Basil the Great prayed for the defeat of Julian in his wars against the Persians; and it was through his prayers that the apostate was in fact killed, as was revealed by God to the holy hermit Julian of Mesopotamia.[503] At this, St. Basil's friend, St. Gregory the Theologian wrote: "I call to spiritual rejoicing all those who constantly remained in fasting, in mourning and prayer, and by day and by night besought deliverance from the sorrows that surrounded us and found a reliable healing from the evils in unshakeable hope… What hoards of weapons, what myriads of men could have produced what our prayers and the will of God produced?" Gregory called Julian not only an "apostate", but also "universal enemy" and "general murderer", a traitor to Romanity (ρωμειοσυνη or Romanitas)– that is, the religio-political ethos of the Christian Roman empire - as well as to Christianity.[504]

Again, when the Norman Duke William invaded England in 1066 with the blessing of the Pope, and was crowned as the first Catholic king of England in the following year, the brother-bishops and hieromartyrs Ethelric and Ethelwine solemnly anathematized both him and the Pope, and called on the people to rise up against the false authority (they did, and 20% of the English

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[502] St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, April 17.

[503] Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 19; V.A. Konovalov, *Otnoshenie Khristianstva k sovietskoj vlasti (The Relationship of Christianity to Soviet Power)*, Montreal, 1936, p. 35 (in Russian).

[504] St. Gregory, *First Word against Julian*, 35; *Second Word against Julian*, 26. In the *Life* of St. Artemius the Great Martyr (St. Demetrius of Rostov, *Lives of the Saints*, October 20), we read that Julian refused to recognise the legitimacy even of the reign of St. Constantine the Great. In this sense he, like the Bolsheviks after him, renounced Christian Romanity and thereby became anti-Roman as well as anti-Christian.

population was killed by the papists). Again, in 1611 St. Hermogen, patriarch of Moscow, called on the Russian people to rise up against the crypto-Catholic false Demetrius, although the latter had been anointed by a supposedly Orthodox patriarch.

The state that is refused recognition by the Church is the state of organized anarchy – that is, the state in which crime is not only not punished, as in disorganized anarchy, but is confirmed and recognized as lawful. Thus the essence of antichristian power is not simply the doing of evil – all states, even the most Orthodox, at times do evil – but the systematic recognition of evil as good, of lawlessness as the law, of the abnormal as the norm and even the aim of society. Such a state is "the mystery of lawlessness" (II Thessalonians 2.7).

Such a state was the Bolshevik regime, which, taking advantage of the disorganized anarchy prevailing under the Provisional government, not only did not restore order, but consolidated, intensified and organized the chaos, made it the norm, made it "lawful". Church tradition calls unlawful councils, councils that preach heresy instead of truth, "robber councils". In the same way, unlawful states such as the Bolshevik regime can be called "robber states", insofar as murder, robbery and sacrilege become the norm under them – indeed, are committed primarily by the state itself. Robber states cannot command the obedience of God-fearing Christians, for they are not authorities in the apostolic sense of the word, but "anti-authorities". Rather, such states must be rebuked and rejected by them.

That is why, on November 11, 1917, the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church addressed a letter to the faithful calling the revolution "descended from the Antichrist" and declaring: "Open combat is fought against the Christian Faith, in opposition to all that is sacred, arrogantly abasing all that bears the name of God (II Thessalonians 2.4)… But no earthly kingdom founded on ungodliness can ever survive: it will perish from internal strife and party dissension. Thus, because of its frenzy of atheism, the State of Russia will fall… For those who use the sole foundation of their power in the coercion of the whole people by one class, no motherland or holy place exists. They have become traitors to the motherland and instigated an appalling betrayal of Russia and her true allies. But, to our grief, as yet no government has arisen which is sufficiently one with the people to deserve the blessing of the Orthodox Church. And such will not appear on Russian soil until we turn with agonizing prayer and tears of repentance to Him, without Whom we labour in vain to lay foundations…"

In January, 1918, Patriarch Tikhon and the Local Council meeting in Moscow anathematized the Bolsheviks. The significance of this anathema lies not so much in its casting out of the Bolsheviks themselves (all those who deny God are subject to anathema, for that very denial), as in the command to the faithful: "I adjure all of you who are faithful children of the Orthodox Church of Christ not to commune with such outcasts of the human race in any matter whatsoever; 'cast out the wicked from among you' (I Corinthians

5.13)." In other words, the Bolsheviks were to be regarded, not only as apostates from Christ (that was obvious), but also as having no moral authority, *no claim to obedience whatsoever*.[505]

It has been argued that the Patriarch's decree did not anathematise Soviet power as such, but only those who were committing acts of violence and sacrilege against the Church in various parts of the country. However, this argument fails to take into account several facts. First, the patriarch himself, in his declarations of June 16 and July 1, 1923, repented precisely of his "anathematisation of Soviet power".[506] Secondly, even if the decree did not formally anathematise Soviet power as such, since Soviet power sanctioned and initiated the acts of violence, the faithful were in effect being exhorted to having nothing to do with it. And thirdly, in his Epistle to the Council of People's Commissars on the first anniversary of the revolution, November 7, 1918, the Patriarch obliquely but clearly confirmed his non-recognition of Soviet power, saying: "It is not our business to make judgments about earthly authorities. Every power allowed by God would attract to itself Our blessing *if it were truly 'the servant of God', for the good of those subject to it, and were 'terrible not for good works, but for evil'* (Romans 13.3,4). *But now to you, who have used authority for the persecution of the innocent,* We extend this Our word of exhortation… "[507]

Most important of all, when the Patriarch's decree came to be read out to the Council on January 22 / February 4, it was enthusiastically endorsed by it in terms which make it clear that the Council understood the Patriarch to have anathematised precisely Soviet power: "The Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia in his epistle to the beloved in the Lord archpastors, pastors and all faithful children of the Orthodox Church of Christ has drawn the spiritual sword against the outcasts of the human race – the Bolsheviks, and anathematised them. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church adjures all her faithful children not to enter into any communion with these outcasts. For their satanic deeds they are cursed in this life and in the life to come. Orthodox! His Holiness the Patriarch has been given the right to bind and to loose according to the word of the Saviour… Do not destroy your souls, cease communion with the servants of Satan – the Bolsheviks. Parents, if your children are Bolsheviks, demand authoritatively that they renounce their errors, that they bring forth repentance for their eternal sin, and if they do not obey you, renounce them. Wives, if your husbands are Bolsheviks and stubbornly continue to serve Satan, leave your husbands, save yourselves and your children from the soul-destroying infection. An Orthodox Christian cannot have communion with the servants of the devil… Repent, and with burning prayer call for help from the Lord of Hosts and thrust away from yourselves 'the hand of strangers' – the age-old enemies of the Christian faith,

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[505] M.E. Gubonin, *Akty Sviatejshago Patriarkha Tikhona (The Acts of His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon)*, Moscow: St. Tikhon's Theological Institute, 1994, pp. 82-85 (in Russian).
[506] Gubonin, op. cit., pp. 280, 296.
[507] Gubonin, op. cit., p. 151.

who have declared themselves in self-appointed fashion 'the people's power'… If you do not obey the Church, you will not be her sons, but participants in the cruel and satanic deeds wrought by the open and secret enemies of Christian truth… Dare! Do not delay! Do not destroy your soul and hand it over to the devil and his stooges."[508]

This first instinct of the Russian Church in the face of Soviet power has never been extinguished among Russian Christians. It continued to manifest itself both at home and abroad - for example, in the First All-Emigration Council of the Russian Church Abroad in 1921, and both in the early and the later decades of Soviet power - for example, among the "passportless" Christians of the Catacomb Church in the 1960s and 70s. However, it was very soon tempered by the realisation that such outright rejection of Soviet power on a large scale could be sustained only by *war* - and after the defeat of the White Armies in the Civil War there were no armies left to carry on the fight against the Bolsheviks. Therefore from the early 1920s a new attitude towards Soviet power began to evolve among the Tikhonite Christians: loyalty towards it as a political institution ("for all power is from God"), and acceptance of such of its laws as could be interpreted in favour of the Church (for example, the law on the separation of Church and State), combined with rejection of its atheistic world-view (large parts of which the renovationists, by contrast, accepted). In essence, this new attitude involved accepting that the Soviet State was not the Antichrist, as the Local Council of 1917-18 and the Russian Church Abroad had in effect declared, but Caesar, no worse in principle than the Caesars of Ancient Rome, to whom the things belonging to Caesar were due.

This attitude presupposed that it was possible, in the Soviet Union as in Ancient Rome, to draw a clear line between politics and religion. But in practice, even more than in theory, this line proved very hard to draw. For the early Bolsheviks, at any rate, there was no such dividing line; for them, *everything* was ideological, everything had to be in accordance with their ideology, there could be no room for disagreement, no private spheres into which the state and its ideology did not pry. Unlike most of the Roman emperors, who allowed the Christians to order their own lives in their own way so long as they showed loyalty to the state (which, as we have seen, the Christians were very eager to do), the Bolsheviks insisted in imposing their own ways upon the Christians in every sphere: in family life (civil marriage only, divorce on demand, children spying on parents), in education (compulsory Marxism), in economics (dekulakization, collectivization), in military service (the oath of allegiance to Lenin), in science (Darwinism, Lysenkoism), in art (socialist realism), and in religion (the requisitioning of valuables, registration, commemoration of the authorities at the Liturgy,

[508] "Iz sobraniya Tsentral'nogo gosudarstvennogo arkhiva Oktyabr'skoj revolyutsii: listovka pod □ 1011 (From the collection of the Central State Archinve of the October revolution: leaflet without indications, □ 1011", *Nauka i Religia (Science and Religion)*, 1989, no. 4 (in Russian).

reporting of confessions by the priests). Resistance to any one of these demands was counted as "anti-Soviet behaviour", i.e. *political* disloyalty. Therefore it was no use protesting one's political loyalty to the regime if one refused to accept just one of these demands. According to the Soviet interpretation of the word: "Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one has become guilty of all of it" (James 2.10), such a person was an *enemy of the people*.

In view of this, it is not surprising that many Christians came to the conclusion that it was less morally debilitating to reject the whole regime that made such impossible demands, since the penalty would be the same whether one asserted one's loyalty to it or not. And if this meant living as an outlaw, so be it. Such a rejection of, or flight from the state had precedents in Russian history; and we find some priests, such as Hieromartyr Timothy Strelkov of Mikhailovka (+1930) and even some bishops, such as Hieroconfessor Amphilochius of Yeniseisk (+1946), adopting this course.[509]

Nevertheless, the path of total rejection of the Soviet state required enormous courage, strength and self-sacrifice, not only for oneself but also (which was more difficult) for one's family or flock. It is therefore not surprising that, already during the Civil War, the Church began to soften her anti-Soviet rhetoric and try once more to draw the line between politics and religion. This is what Patriarch Tikhon tried to do in the later years of his patriarchate – with the best of motives (to save Christian lives), but, it must be said, only mixed results. Thus his decision to allow some, but not all of the Church's valuables to be requisitioned by the Bolsheviks in 1922 not only did not bring help to the starving of the Volga, as was the intention, but led to many clashes between believers and the authorities and many deaths of believers. For, as the holy Elder Nectarius of Optina said: "You see now, the patriarch gave the order to give up all valuables from the churches, but they belonged to the Church!"[510]

The decision to negotiate and compromise with the Bolsheviks - in transgression of the decrees of the 1917-18 Council - only brought confusion and division to the Church. Thus on the right wing of the Church there were those who thought that the patriarch had already gone too far; while on the left wing there were those who wanted to go further. However, neither Patriarch Tikhon nor his successor, Metropolitan Peter, crossed the line which would have involved surrendering the spiritual freedom of the Church into the hands of the authorities.

That line was crossed only with the coming to power, in 1927, of Metropolitan Peter's deputy, Metropolitan Sergius. He sought and obtained

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[509] See Schema-Monk Epiphanius (Chernov), *Tserkov' Katakombnaia na Zemlye Rossijskoj (The Catacomb Church on the Russian Land)*, 1980 (Woking, England, 1980, typescript, in Russian).

[510] Matushka Evgenia Grigorievna Rymarenko, "Remembrances of Optina Staretz Hieroschemamonk Nektary", *Orthodox Life*, vol. 36, □ 3, May-June, 1986, p. 39.

legalization for his church organization, the present-day Moscow Patriarchate. And then introduced the commemoration of the God-hating anti-authorities at the Divine Liturgy.

This was a fateful step, because to seek legalisation from a state inescapably implies recognition of that state to a greater or lesser degree; at a minimum, it implies recognition of that state as God-established and the majority of its laws as binding on Christians. But how can a state that openly and systematically wars against God be God-established? And how can a state that legalizes all manner of crimes be considered to be legal in itself and the fount of legality?! Rather, such a state is not an authority at all, but the beast of the Apocalypse, of whom it is written that it receives its authority, not from God, but from the devil (Revelation 13.2).

Moreover, by declaring, in his famous "Declaration", that the Soviet regime's joys were the Church's joys, and its sorrows the Church's sorrows, Sergius in effect declared an *identity of aims* between the Church and the State. And this was not just a lie, but *a lie against the faith,* a concession to the communist *ideology*. For it implied that communism as such was good, and its victory to be welcomed.

Thus Sergius Nilus quoted *Izvestia*, which said that Metropolitan Sergius' "Declaration" was an attempt "to construct a cross in such a way that it would look like a hammer to a worker, and like a sickle to a peasant". "In other words," said Nilus, "to exchange the cross for the Soviet seal, **the seal of the beast** (Rev. 13.16)."[511]

In order to protect the flock of Christ from Sergius' apostasy, the leaders of the True Church had to draw once more the line between politics and religion. One approach was to distinguish between *physical* opposition to the regime and *spiritual* opposition to it. Thus Hieromartyr Archbishop Barlaam of Perm wrote that physical opposition was not permitted, but spiritual opposition was obligatory.[512] Again, Hieromartyr Bishop Mark (Novoselov) wrote: "I am an enemy of Soviet power – and what is more, by dint of my religious convictions, insofar as Soviet power is an atheist power and even anti-theist. I believe that as a true Christian I cannot strengthen this power by any means… [There is] a petition which the Church has commanded to be used everyday in certain well-known conditions… The purpose of this formula is to request the overthrow of the infidel power by God… But this formula does not amount to a summons to believers to take active measures, but only calls them to pray for the overthrow of the power that has fallen away from

[511] Nilus, "Pis'mo o Sergianstve (Letter on Sergianism)", *Russkij Pastyr' (Russian Pastor)*, 28-29, II/III, 1997, p. 180 (in Russian).
[512] Cited in William Fletcher, *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground, 1917-1970*, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 64.

God."[513] This criterion allowed Christians quite sincerely to reject the charge of "counter-revolution" - if "counter-revolution" were understood to mean *physical* rebellion. The problem was, as we have seen, that the Bolsheviks understood "counter-revolution" in a much wider sense…

Another, still more basic problem was that it still left the question whether Soviet power was from God or not unresolved. If Soviet power was from God, it should be counted as Caesar and should be given what was Caesar's. But bitter experience had shown that this "Caesar" wanted to seat himself in the temple as if he were God (II Thessalonians 2.4). So was he not in fact Antichrist, whose power is not from God, but from Satan (Revelation 13.2), being *allowed* by God for the punishment of sinners, but by no means *established* by Him? If so, then there was no alternative but to flee into the catacombs, rejecting totally the government of Satan on earth.

In the early years after Metropolitan Sergius' declaration, many Catacomb Christians, while *in practice* not surrendering what was God's to the Soviets, *in theory* could not make up their minds whether the Soviet regime was Caesar or Antichrist. Thus Hieromartyr Joseph (Gavrilov), superior of Raithu Desert (+1930), confessed at his interrogation: "I have never, and do not now, belong to any political parties. I consider Soviet power to be given from God, but a power that is from God must fulfil the will of God, and Soviet power does not fulfil the will of God. Therefore it is not from God, but from Satan. It closes churches, mocks the holy icons, teaches children atheism, etc. That is, it fulfils the will of Satan... It is better to die with faith than without faith. I am a real believer, faith has saved me in battles, and I hope that in the future faith will save me from death. I firmly believe in the Resurrection of Christ and His Second Coming. I have not gone against the taxes, since it says in Scripture: 'To Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'"[514] From this confession, impressive though it is, it is not clear whether Hieromartyr Joseph recognised the Soviet regime as Caesar, and therefore from God, or as Antichrist, and therefore from Satan. In the end the Bolsheviks resolved his dilemma for him. They shot him, and therefore showed that they were - Antichrist.

In the Russian Church in Exile, meanwhile, a consensus had emerged that the Soviet regime was not Caesar, but Antichrist. This was the position of, for example, Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava, Metropolitan Innocent of Peking and Archbishop Averky of Jordanville.[515]

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[513] Novoselov, quoted in I.I. Osipova, "Istoria Istinno Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi po Materialam Sledstvennago Dela (The History of the True Orthodox Church from Investigative Case Material)", *Pravoslavnaia Rus' (Orthodox Rus')*, □ 14 (1587), July 15/28, 1997, p. 3 (in Russian).

[514] *Novie Prepodobnomucheniki Raifskie (The New Monk-Martyrs of Raithu)*, publication of the Kazan diocese, Moscow, 1997, p. 17 (in Russian)

[515] Cf. *The Letters of Archbishop Theophanes of Poltava and Pereyaslavl*, Jordanville, 1976; Archbishop Averky, "Nevidimij Mir – sily besplotnie (The invisible world – the bodiless angels)", *Slova i Rechi (Sermons and Speeches)*, Jordanville, 1975, vol. 2, pp. 593-95; Metropolitan Innocent, "On Soviet Power", in Archbishop Nikon (Rklitsky), *Zhizneopisanie Blazhennejshago*

As Bishop Gregory (Grabbe), the foremost canonist of the Russian Church Abroad, wrote: "With regard to the question of the commemoration of authorities, we must bear in mind that now we are having dealings not simply with a pagan government like Nero's, but with the apostasy of the last times. Not with a so far unenlightened authority, but with apostasy. The Holy Fathers did not relate to Julian the Apostate in the same way as they did to the other pagan Emperors. And we cannot relate to the antichristian authorities in the same way as to any other, for its nature is purely satanic…"[516]

2. The Seal of the Soviet Antichrist

If the Soviet state was the collective Antichrist, the beast of the Apocalypse, what was its seal? In the case of the Church, this question has already been answered: the seal was "legalisation" by "the mystery of lawlessness", on the one hand, and the commemoration of the Antichrist *by name* at the liturgy, on the other. This was the "abomination of desolation" set up in the Holy of holies.

In the case of individual Christians, the answer is analogous: the seal of the Antichrist was any activity that presupposed participation in, and recognition of, the Soviet state. For the main lesson of the 1920s and 30s was that it is vain to see a modus vivendi with the Antichrist: he takes everything and gives nothing in return, as Metropolitan Peter once bitterly complained to the Soviet "over-procurator" Tuchkov. So the Christians began to avoid everything that tied them in any way to the state: Soviet passports (which, at least in some periods, involved definite obligations to the state); service in the Red Army (how can a Christian fight for "the conquests of October"?); Soviet educational institutions (which involved compulsory study of, and examinations in, Marxism-Leninism); and any and every kind of electoral or political activity (which was monopolised by the communist party).

There was no consensus among Catacomb Christians about what activities were to be considered as "Soviet"; some groups and branches of the Church were stricter, others less strict. Thus some "non-commemorators" took jobs in Soviet institutions and restricted their abstinence from Soviet life to non-membership of the communist party and the Soviet church. Others not only refused to work for the Antichrist in any way, but even refused to have electricity in their homes, since this, too, came to them from the Antichrist. As Soviet power weakened, some Catacomb Christians felt able to practise "economy" and temper the strictness of their rule, Thus the Catacomb hieromonk Gury (Pavlov) was a "passportless", but took a Soviet passport in 1990 in order to receive consecration to the episcopate in the U.S.A.

Antonia, mitropolita Kievskago i Galitskago (Life of his Beatitude Anthony, Metropolitan of Kiev and Galich), Montreal, 1960, volume 6, pp. 168-172 (in Russian)

[516] Grabbe, *Letters*, Moscow, 1998, p. 85 (in Russian).

The question of Soviet passports needs to be examined in a little more detail. Passportisation had been introduced into the Soviet Union only in 1932, and only for the most urbanized areas. Already then it was used as a means of winkling out Catacomb Christians. Thus M.V. Shkvarovsky writes: "Completing their liquidation of the Josephites, there was a meeting of regional inspectors for cultic matters on March 16, 1933, at a time when passportisation was being introduced. The meeting decided, on the orders of the OGPU, 'not to give passports to servants of the cult of the Josephite confession of faith', which meant automatic expulsion from Leningrad. Similar things happened in other major cities of the USSR."[517]

Catacomb hierarchs did not bless their spiritual children to take passports because in filling in the forms the social origins and record of Christians was revealed, making them liable to persecution. Also Catacomb Christians did not want to receive what they considered to be the seal of the Antichrist, or to declare themselves citizens of the antichristian kingdom.

In the 1930s the peasants had not been given passports but were chained to the land which they worked. They were herded into the collective farms and forced to do various things against their conscience, such as vote for the communist officials who had destroyed their way of life and their churches. Those who refused to do this – refusals were particularly common in the Lipetsk, Tambov and Voronezh areas – were rigorously persecuted, and often left to die of hunger.

On May 4, 1961, however, the Soviet government issued its decree on "parasitism" and introduced its campaign for general passportisation. In local papers throughout the country it was announced that, in order to receive a Soviet passport, a citizen of the USSR would have to recognize all the laws of Soviet power, past and present, beginning from Lenin's decrees. Since this involved, in effect, a recognition of all the crimes of Soviet power, a movement arose to reject Soviet passports, a movement which was centred mainly in the country areas among those peasants and their families who had rejected collectivization in the 1930s.

E.A. Petrova writes: "Protests against general passportisation arose among Christians throughout the vast country. A huge number of secret Christians who had passports began to reject them, destroy them, burn them and loudly, for all to hear, renounce Soviet citizenship. Many Christians from the patriarchal church also gave in their passports. There were cases in which as many as 200 people at one time went up to the local soviet and gave in their passports. In one day the whole of a Christian community near Tashkent gave in 100 passports at once. Communities in Kemerovo and Novosibirsk provinces gave in their passports, and Christians in the Altai area burned their passports… Protests against general passportisation broke out in

[517] Shkvarovsky, *Iosiflianstvo (Josephitism)*, St. Petersburg, 1999, p. 171.

Belorussia, in the Ukraine, and in the Voronezh, Tambov and Ryazan provinces… Christians who renounced their Soviet passports began to be seized and, imprisoned and exiled. But in spite of these repressions the movement of the passportless Christians grew and became stronger. It was precisely in these years that the Catacomb Church received a major influx from Christians of the patriarchal church who renounced Soviet passports and returned into the bosom of the True Orthodox Church."[518]

In the 1970s the detailed questionnaires required in order to receive passports were abandoned, but in 1974 it was made obligatory for all Soviet citizens to have a passport, and a new, red passport differing quite significantly from the old, green one. However, it contained a cover with the words: "Passport of a citizen of the Soviet Socialist Republics" together with a hammer and sickle, which was still unacceptable to the Passportless, who therefore continued to be subject to prison, exile and hunger. Those who joined the Catacomb Church at this time often erased the word "citizen", replacing it with the word "Christian", so that they had a "Passport of a Christian of the Soviet Socialist Republics".

In recent years the great podvig of the Passportless Catacomb Christians has been criticised by some, and not only, as we would expect, by members of the Soviet and other heterodox churches. Thus Metropolitan Vitaly, first-hierarch of the ROCA, in a dialogue with representatives of the Passportless, compared the Soviet Union to the Roman Empire. St Paul had been proud of his Roman citizenship, he wrote, so what was wrong with having a Soviet passport and being called a Soviet citizen?[519] Passportless Christians were appalled by the comparison – as if Rome, the state in which Christ Himself was born and was registered in a census, and which later grew into the great Orthodox Christian empires of Byzantium, the New Rome, and Russia, the Third Rome, could be compared to the anti-state, the collective Antichrist, that destroyed the Russian empire![520] Rome, even in its pagan phase, had protected the Christians from the fury of the Jews: the Soviet Union was, in its early phase, the instrument of the Jews *against* the Christians. Rome, even in its pagan phase, guaranteed a framework of law and order within which the apostles could rapidly spread the faith from one end of the world to the other: the Soviet Union forced a population that was already Orthodox in its great majority to renounce their faith or hide it "in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth" (Hebrews 11.38).

Still more recently, an anonymous publication has accused the Catacomb Christians of "premature flight" from the world, analogous to the flight of the

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[518] Petrova, "Perestroika Vavilonskoj Bashni (The Reconstruction of the Tower of Babylon)", Moscow, 1991, pp. 5-6 (samizdat MS) (in Russian). Cf. Mervyn Matthews, *The Passport Society*, Oxford: Westview Press, 1993, chapter 3.

[519] Metropolitan Vitaly, "Otvet bespassportnomu (Reply to a passportless)", *Pravoslavnij Vestnik (Orthodox Herald)*, February-March, 1990 (in Russian).

[520] Petrova, op. cit.

Old Believers from Russian society. On this path of premature flight from the world, writes the anonymous author, "set out the schismatic Old Ritualists under Peter. In our century, the Catacomb Christians decisively refused to accept any state documents, seeing in them the seal of the Antichrist. Of course, in Peter's reign, and still more in Stalin's regime, elements of an antichristian kingdom were evident. But such terrible rebellions against the God-established order were not yet the end, 'this is only the beginning of sorrows', as the Gospel says (Luke 21.9)."[521]

So what is the anonymous author asserting? That the Catacomb Christians are schismatics on a par with the Old Ritualists?! This not only constitutes a serious slander against the Catacomb Church, but also betrays a blindness with regard to the eschatological significance of the Russian-Jewish revolution, which, if only the "beginning" of sorrows, was nevertheless also the beginning of the reign of the Antichrist, when the relationship between the Church and the State changed from one of cooperation and mutual recognition to one of mutual non-recognition and the most fundamental incompatibility.

There can be no doubt that Peter the Great inflicted great damage on the Church (and thereby indirectly also on the State, for which it paid in 1917) through his westernizing reforms. However, the conscience of the Church, while rejecting his errors, has always recognized that he died as a Christian and God-anointed tsar (see the *Life* of St. Metrophanes of Voronezh, who appeared to one of his venerators after his death and told him: "If you want to be pleasing to me, pray for the repose of the soul of Emperor Peter the Great"[522]). No saint of the Church ever counselled rebellion against Peter or his successors, as opposed to resistance to certain of their decrees.[523]

As for the Old Ritualists, their rebellion was not in the first place against Peter and his reforms, but against Patriarch Nicon and *his* reforms, which was quickly followed by rebellion against Peter's father, Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich also. Later, they seized on Peter's reforms as an excuse for widening and deepening their rebellion against the God-established order, making them the forerunners, not of the True Orthodox Christians of the Soviet catacombs, who always recognized that which the Old Ritualists rejected, but of the revolutionaries of 1905 and 1917. As Archbishop Anthony (Khrapovitsky)

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[521] *Kreditnie kartochki ili pechat' antikhrista? (Credit cards or the seal of the antichrist?)*, St. Petersburg: Tsentr Pravoslavnogo prosveshcheniya, 2000, pp. 8-9.

[522] *Zhitia Sviatykh (The Lives of the Saints0*, Moscow, 1908; first supplementary book. Quoted in *Svecha Pokaiania (Candle of Repentance)*, □ 1, March, 1998, p. 7.

[523] As Hieromonk Dionysius points out, "the service of 'him that restraineth', although undermined, was preserved by Russian monarchical power even after Peter – and it is necessary to emphasize this. It was preserved because neither the people nor the Church renounced the very ideal of the Orthodox kingdom, and, as even V. Klyuchevsky noted, continued to consider as law that which corresponded to this ideal, and not Peter's decrees." (Priest Timothy and Hieromonk Dionysius Alferov, *O Tserkvi, pravoslavnom Tsarstve i poslednem vremeni (On the Church, the Orthodox Kingdom and the Last Times)*, Moscow: "Russkaia Idea", 1998, p. 66).

wrote in 1912, in his encyclical to the Old Ritualists: "The spirit of this world… winks at real revolutionaries and sent the money of your rich men to create the Moscow rebellion of 1905."[524]

Another, more moderate objection is sometimes raised: that the exploit (podvig) of the Catacomb Christians, while admirable and justified in view of the ferocity of the Soviet regime, was nevertheless not necessary, for one could be saved without resorting to such extreme measures.

The present writer is not aware of any decision by any competent Church authority that would clarify the question whether the rejection of Soviet passports was necessary for the salvation of Christians in the Soviet period. It may be that such a question cannot be answered in a clear and categorical manner in view of the great complexity and diversity of the relations between individual believers and the Soviet state. Only God knows whether any particular degree of involvement in Soviet life constituted apostasy or an acceptable level of accommodation to circumstances.

However, the question whether the podvig of the Catacomb Christians was "necessary" is much easier to answer. It is as easy to answer as the question: Is it necessary to keep as far away from sin as possible, or: Is it necessary to take every possible precaution against sin? The answer, of course, is: yes, it is absolutely necessary!

The English have a parable: when you have supper with the devil, take a very long spoon. The Catacomb Christians took not even very long spoons to the marriage feast of the devil and the citizens of the Soviet state. In their completely laudable zeal to keep their bridal garments spotless for the marriage feast of Christ and His Church, they chose not even to step over the threshold of the Soviet madhouse. They chose rather to go hungry than eat of the devil's food, the communion of heretics and apostates.

And not only did they save their own souls thereby: they also provided an absolutely necessary warning to those Christians who, thinking that they could take coals into their breast and not be burned, were being tempted into closer relations with the Antichrist. For as the beast's ferocity gradually lessened from the 1956 amnesty onwards, and the Soviet state began to acquire some (but never all) of the external characteristics of the "normal" state, it was indeed tempting to think that the leopard was changing its spots, that the lion was becoming a vegetarian, that Pharaoh was becoming Caesar – so that it was now time to give to Caesar what was Caesar's…

Against this terribly dangerous temptation, the movement of the Passportless, which exploded at precisely this time, came as a powerful warning. "No," they said, "the beast has not changed its nature. If its

[524] Quoted in "Otnoshenia s Staroobriadchestvom (Relations with Old Believerism)", *Vozdvizhenie, (Exaltation),* Winter, 2000, p. 76.

persecution is less widespread now than before, this is because the opposition to him has been largely destroyed. The persecution now is no less fierce than before, only it is more subtle, for it now mixes rewards – the comforts of the Soviet "paradise" – with punishments. But 'here we have no continuing city'; and if this was true even under the God-loving tsars, how can it not be even more so now, under the God-hating Antichrist? If Christ suffered *outside* the walls of the city in order to sanctify us by His Blood, then we, too, must go out to Him *outside* the walls of the antichristian state (Hebrews 13.12-14)."

Now, having said all this, it must be admitted that the seal of the Antichrist in Soviet Russia could not have been the same seal that is mentioned in Revelation 13, if only because it was not a mark placed on the right hand and forehead. (Only in this sense could the Soviet seal be said to be on the forehead and right hand: in that it prevented people, "from fear of the Jews", from making the sign of the cross with their right hand on their forehead.)

However, we are fully justified in calling it *a* seal (of the collective Antichrist), if not *the* seal (of the personal Antichrist); for its acceptance, at least in certain contexts (for example, the context of the 1961 law), entailed acceptance of the whole lawless legislation and ideology of the Soviet state. To that extent it was not just a neutral act of registration; it was an act of registration in Satan's kingdom, the kingdom of the Antichrist, and as such was not only the forerunner of *the* seal, but in a sense the beginning of that seal, in that it had the same apocalyptic significance for the life of Christians.

3. The Enigmatic 1990s

If we do not understand the period of Church history immediately preceding our own, then we shall not be able to understand or perceive the signs of our own times. Thus a correct understanding of the seal of the Antichrist in the Soviet period is a necessary prerequisite to understanding the seal in the post-Soviet period.

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 posed a difficult problem of interpretation. Was the Antichrist really dead? If so, then had the end times, paradoxically, come to an end? Or was this only a temporary "breathing space" in which the Antichrist was preparing a new, more subtle, more universal and more deadly onslaught?

The signs were mixed. On the one hand, there can be no doubt that perestroika and the fall of communism came not a moment too soon for the beleaguered Catacomb Church, which was scattered and divided, and desperately short of bishops and priests of unquestioned Orthodoxy and apostolic succession. The fall of the iron curtain enabled the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad to enter Russia and regenerate the hierarchy of the True Church, while the introduction of freedom of speech and the press enabled millions of Soviet citizens to learn the truth about their state and church for the first time. On the basis of this knowledge, they could now seek

entrance into the True Church without the fear of being sent to prison or the camps. In the wave of disillusion with post-Soviet democracy that followed in the mid-1990s, it was pointed out – rightly – that freedom is a two-edged weapon, which can destroy as well as give life, and that "freedom" had brought Russia poverty and crime as well as interesting newspapers. However, for the soul thirsting for truth there is no more precious gift than the freedom to seek and find; and that opportunity was now, at last, presented to the masses.

On the other hand, only a minority of Russians used this freedom to seek the truth that makes one truly, spiritually free. And so if the fall of communism in 1989-91 was a liberation, it was a liberation strangely lacking in joy. Orthodoxy was restored neither to the state nor to the official church, and the masses of the people remained unconverted. Ten years later, a priest of the Moscow Patriarchate could claim that "the regeneration of ecclesiastical life has become a clear manifestation of the miraculous transfiguration of Russia". [525] But behind the newly gilded cupolas reigned heresy and corruption on a frightening scale. It was as Bishop Theophan the Recluse had prophesied over a century before: "Although the Christian name will be heard everywhere, and everywhere will be visible churches and ecclesiastical ceremonies, all this will be just appearances, and within there will be true apostasy. On this soil the Antichrist will be born..."

None of the communist persecutors of the previous seventy years, throughout the whole vast territory of Eastern Europe and Russia, was brought to trial for his crimes. The consequences have been all too evident. Thus one group of "repentant" communists, sensing the signs of the political times, seized power in 1991 in a "democratic" coup and immediately formed such close and dependent ties on its western allies that the formerly advanced (if inefficient) economy of Russia was transformed into a scrap-heap of obsolescent factories, on the one hand, and a source of cheap raw materials for the West, on the other.[526] Another group, playing on the sense of betrayal felt by many, formed a nationalist opposition – but an opposition characterized by hatred, envy and negativism rather than a constructive understanding of the nation's real spiritual needs and identity. Still others, using the contacts and dollars acquired in their communist days, went into "business" – that is, a mixture of crime, extortion and the worst practices of capitalism. It is little wonder that in many churches the prayer to be delivered "from the bitter torment of atheist rule" continues to be chanted…

In the midst of this disorganized anarchy, many have begun to long nostalgically for the organized anarchy of the Soviet period, considering that the cheapness of Soviet sausages somehow outweighed the destruction of tens of millions of souls through Soviet violence and propaganda. Like the

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[525] Fr. Andrej Rumyantsev, "Kesariu Kesarevo (To Caesar what is Caesar's)", *Vecherniaia Moskva (Evening Moscow)*, 21 September, 2000, p. 1.

[526] See Mikhail Nazarov, *Tajna Rossii (The Mystery of Russia)*, Moscow: "Russkaia Idea", 1999.

children of Israel who became disillusioned with the rigorous freedom of the desert, they have begun to long once more for the fleshpots of Egypt. But unlike the Israelites, the wanderers in the desert of post-Soviet Russia have had no Moses to urge them ever onwards to the Promised Land. True, they feel the need for such a leader; and if many still long for the return of a Stalin, there are many who prefer the image of Tsar Nicholas II, whose ever-increasing veneration must be considered one of the most encouraging phenomena of the 1990s. But veneration for the pre-revolutionary tsars will not bring forward the appearance of a post-revolutionary tsar unless that veneration is combined with repentance. Few understand that the people must become worthy of such a tsar by a return to the True Church and a life based on the commandments of God. Otherwise, if they continue to worship the golden calf, the new Moses, if such a one appears, will break the tablets of the new law before their eyes. And if they continue to follow the new Dathans and Abirams of the heretical Moscow Patriarchate, then under their feet, too, the earth will open – or they will be condemned to wander another forty years in the desert, dying before they reach the promised land of a cleansed and Holy Russia.

It is in the context of this general mood of confusion, disillusion and apocalyptic expectation that the new forms of identification and money exchange, containing, if the experts are to be believed, the number 666, have aroused such alarm in the Orthodox countries of Eastern Europe and Russia – and indeed, throughout the world. That these forms of identification came from the West rather than the East only increased the sense of apocalyptic foreboding; for in the view of many the capitalist West was no less antichristian than the post-communist East, having many of the same characteristics of *lawlessness.* Thus the American hieromonk Fr. Seraphim Rose wrote: "If we look around at our 20th-century civilization, lawlessness or anarchy is perhaps the chief characteristic which identifies it… In the realm of moral teaching, it is quite noticeable, especially in the last twenty years or so, how lawlessness has become the norm, how even people in high positions and the clergy in liberal denominations are quite willing to justify all kinds of things which before were considered immoral… All this is a sign of what St. Paul calls 'the mystery of lawlessness'."[527]

Some have mocked the idea that these new forms of identification could be the seal of the Antichrist.[528] Thus the anonymous author cited above writes, quoting Luke 2.1-4: "The Most Pure Virgin Mary, and even the Saviour Himself borne in her cradle, took part in a census. And this took place during the reign of the *pagan* Emperor Augustus. This act – census-taking – is the essence of all contemporary registration cards, individual numbers, etc. In antiquity officials registered the names of people and gave them a number.

[527] Rose, in Monk Damascene, *Not of this World*, Forestville, Ca.: Fr. Seraphim Rose Foundation, 1995, pp. 996-997.

[528] The Old Believer Priest Gennady Chunin has written intelligently against identifying the bar-code in Russian tax declaration forms with the apocalyptic number: "The tax number and the seal of the Antichrist", *Dukhovnie Otvety (Spiritual Replies)*, □ 14, 2000, pp. 67-80.

The registration was undertaken with the aid of the technical means of that time: with a quill on parchment. Even the Mother of God, who was beyond all corruption and filled with the Holy Spirit, received some kind of *number* in these lists. Now officials make similar registers with the aid of other means. The essence remains the same: the state receives information on its citizens which is necessary for the execution of government."[529]

But is the essence really the same then and now? We have already seen that the pagan Roman empire cannot be considered to be the same kind of State as the kingdom of the Antichrist. There is no evidence that the census information obtained by the Roman emperors was used for any evil purpose. But already in the Soviet period, registration (passportisation) was most definitely used for evil, antichristian purposes, and was therefore avoided by the Catacomb Christians. The question to be asked about the modern forms of identification is: are they now being used, or could they be used in the future, for antichristian purposes?

The anonymous author considers that the modern forms of identification could not be the seal of the Antichrist, in the first place because "they do not symbolize love for any particular person"[530] – and the seal, according to St. Nilus the Myrrhgusher, contains an inscription expressing voluntary acceptance of, and love for, the Antichrist. According to this author, *external* imprinting, "pieces of paper and plastic and electronic gadgets", divert the attention of believers from the real, *internal* imprinting with the seal – apostasy from Christ through participation in the heresy of ecumenism. Moreover, this internal imprinting with heresy has an external aspect in the form of external rituals and sacraments. "'Orthodox' bishops together with representatives of every possible religion raised a pagan idol in Vancouver, passed through 'purifying smoke' in Canberra, etc. There are many examples… The essence of these abominations is renunciation of Christ the God-man. All these actions receive the approbation of the [Moscow Patriarchal] Synod. *And not one of the bishops has declared his protest. This means that the whole fullness of the episcopate is 'sealed' - by direct participation or silent non-resistance – with the seal of apostasy from Christ. And this is the essence of the number of the beast…*"[531]

And yet where is the number here? As far as the present writer knows, the number 666 is not imprinted on any of the participants in ecumenical worship. Of course, we can completely agree with the anonymous author that participation in the ecumenical movement is indeed a sin unto death, and that receiving the "sacraments" of the ecumenists is analogous to imprinting with the seal of the Antichrist. But this is an analogy, a type – no more. It is obvious that the seal of the Antichrist, as described in the Apocalypse, is something different. It is a mark placed on the forehead and right hand without which

[529] *Kreditnie kartochki…*, op. cit., p. 35.
[530] *Kreditnie kartochki…*, op. cit., p. 11.
[531] *Kreditnie kartochki…*, op. cit., p. 14.

people will not be able to buy or sell; and this it is difficult in this connection not to be struck by the fact that a very similar, electronic or bio-electronic implant under the skin of the forehead and right hand has been proposed as the basis for a worldwide food distribution system!

Thus P. Budzilovich writes: "In the U.S.A., which is the leader of the builders of the 'New World Order', all technical preparations have now been made for the attainment of global control. The National Security Agency already has a super-powerful computer created specially for this aim (Texe Marr 'Project LUCID - the Beast Universal Human Control System', Austin, TX, 1996). Work on the creation of this computer and the required mathematical software has been conducted as part of a project with the code-name 'Project LUCID' (the abbreviation LUCID means bright, radiant; whence 'Lucifer', Satan - light-bearing). They have also worked out means of 'placing the seal' of the beast - biological microcircuits, which are planned to be incorporated into the right hand or the head (at the moment, as reported in 'Phoenix Letter' for March, 1997, the governments of Denmark, the Philippines and Trinidad are taking steps to introduce such microcircuits to check the identities of their citizens, referring to the success of this programme in the U.S.A. Although this work is being carried out in secret in the U.S.A.). The microcircuits will contain all-encompassing information about their bearers, including photographs, fingerprints, feet, snaps of the irises, information about their financial situation, health, etc. It goes without saying that every individual in the whole world will be given a unique registration number. At the moment it is suggested that such a number should consist of 18 digits, in three groups, which means... six digits in each group, forming the image of the number 666."[532]

Now a number or equivalent mark imprinted in some such way into the body (and scanned, perhaps, by satellites in space) could indeed be interpreted as a mark given by the beast.

Tim Willard, editor of the "Futurist" magazine, writes of the biochip: 'The technology behind such a biochip implant is fairly uncomplicated and with a little refinement could be used in a variety of human applications. Conceivably a number could be assigned at birth and follow that person throughout life. Most likely it would be implanted on the back of the right or the left hand so that it would be easy to scan at stores. Then you would simply scan your hand to automatically debit your bank account'"[533]

Again, on November 22, 2003 a new product of the company "Caspian", an implantable RFIC payment chip, was unveiled in Paris. The founder and former director of the company, Katherine Albrecht, writes: "The 'VeriPay' chip contains a unique ID number associated with the individual in whom it

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[532] "Novij Mirovoj Poriadok v 2000-em godu? (The New World Order in the year 2000?)" *Pravoslavnaia Rus' (Orthodox Rus')*, □ 9 (1582), May 1/14, 1997, p. 5.
[533] *Light for the Last Days*, January-March, 1997, pp. 4-5.

is embedded. This unique ID number can be linked to credit card or other payment method and communicated to merchants by merely holding the chipped body part up to an RFIC reader/sales device.

"Though it is not clear which part of the body the company targets for payment chip implantation, my guess is that the upper arm (where the company's 'Verichip' product is currently embedded) would be too cumbersome to wave at a reader device. More likely, the chip will be embedded in an individual's hand or writes to facilitate the 'wave and go' payment system currently possible with the Mobil Speedpass-Timex Wristwatch system."[534]

More recently, Radio Frequency Identification Chips (RFID) have been developed that can be inserted into the skin and can track a person anywhere. Still more recently, a company called Somark has developed an ink tattoo which incorporates the RFID technology…

Now a number or equivalent mark imprinted or tattooed in some such way into the body (and scanned, perhaps, by satellites in space) could indeed be interpreted as a mark given by the second beast, false science.

In this context, the following observation by George Spruksts is important: "Usually, when you want to contact someone on the internet, you type the three letters 'www' [for 'worldwide web']... It is fascinating that in the international alphabet, 'w'… is used to translate the Hebrew letter vav into the standard Roman alphabet. Vav, the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, represents the number 6. So, in a sense, when you type the three letters 'www', you are entering the Hebrew equivalent of '666'. We have all known for a long time that the Antichrist will need a global communications system to carry out his evil schemes. Now, we have one with his initials on it."[535]

It should be remembered that in technologically advanced countries the internet is already widely used for buying and selling various things… At the same time, no means of communication is *in itself* evil. It is the message, rather than the medium, which may be evil.

Also important in this context is the observation by the confessor Sergius Nilus that the Star of David, the symbol of Jewish state power, has a structure which can be described in terms of six sixes.

"The symbol or seal of the mystery of iniquity - of the God-fighting devil, as well as its significance and power (albeit illusory), must be known to every Jew - to the whole of the Jewish people and through it to Masonry, as the ally

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[534] Albrecht, <newsletter@nocards.org>, 22 November, 2003, in [orthodoxjurisdictions] IT'S HERE. VeriPay, implantable RFID payment chip, unveiled today in…, November 24, 2003.
[535] Spruksts, "666 & the World Wide Web", Orthodox@listserv.indiana.edu, 15 September, 1997.

of Jewry. Their seal will also be the seal of their king and antichrist-god, who is not yet, but who will be in the nearest future.

"But does such a symbol, such a seal, really exist among the Jews and Masons?...

"*The six-pointed star*, composed of two interlocking, equal-sided similar triangles... Each of the triangles has three sides, three corners and three apexes. Consequently, in the two triangles there will be 6 sides, 6 corners and 6 apexes...

"In the seal of the Antichrist, therefore, the number 6 is repeated three times, that is: 666, which for fear of the Jews (John 19.38), for the reader who understands (Matthew 24.15) the symbolism of the mystery, could also be represented by the seer of mysteries in writing, as six hundred and sixty-six...

"... This star is truly just as sacred a symbol for the Jew (and therefore for the Mason) as the sign of the life-giving Cross is for the Christian…

"This seal which is sacred for Jewry bears the name in the ritual of the Jewish services of 'Mochin-Dovid', which means 'Shield of David'. They put it into the grave of every right-believing Jews, as an earnest of his communion with his 'god' beyond the grave...

"The Masons and the offshoots of the Masonic tree - the theosophists, the occultists, the spiritualists, the gnostic, etc. - attach just as sacred a significance to this seal, but it has another name. It is called: "The Seal of Solomon" or the Cabbalistic "Tetragramma".

"And so the symbol or seal of Judaeo-Masonry, the "synagogue of Satan" of the apostates from Christ and Jewish kahal is the "tetragramma" of the Cabbala.

"If the seal of those who… are preparing a kingdom for the antichrist is the "tetragramma of Solomon" or "Mochin Dovid", then is it not clear that it will also be the seal of the Antichrist himself?

"Will any of those who believe in Christ renounce the Cross of the Lord? Will he agree to replace it with another symbol?

"No way.

"Nor will the Jews and the Masons renounce their seal, until Israel is converted and they shall look on Him Whom they have pierced..."[536]

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[536] Nilus, *It is Near, at the Very Door*, Sergiev Posad, 1917, pp. 262-263, 248-250 ®.

So the combination of "666" on biochips inserted into our foreheads and right hands, with "666" ("www") on the internet, with "666" as the symbol of Jewish political power (the Star of David), constitutes undoubtedly the closest apparent analogy – if it is only an analogy - to the seal of the Antichrist that has yet appeared in human history. Whether it is in fact *the* seal itself remains to be proved. But only a great insensitivity to "the signs of the times" would fail to be impressed – and alarmed – by this sign.

Now the anonymous author expresses the fear that a premature flight from the world containing these "playthings of civilization" will create schism in the Church, with those who reject them condemning those who do not reject them as schismatics and apostates. While this remains a possibility, we may note that in Greece, where alarm at the new identity cards has provoked mass demonstrations and protests in front of government offices, and some Synods have made an official decisions to reject the cards while others have not, no ecclesiastical schism on this soil has yet arisen. The experience of the Catacomb Church is relevant here again. Although some catacombniks accepted Soviet passports and others did not, no formal schism arose on this soil. The Passportless were (and are) to be found in several catacomb jurisdictions, and some Christians without passports did not refuse to be under the omophorion of bishops with passports. In any case, even if schisms do arise on this soil, that is no reason to sweep the question under the carpet. In this, as in all ecclesiastical controversies, the only rational option is to study the question carefully on the basis of Holy Tradition and come to a corresponding conclusion, whether that leaves one in the majority or in the minority, with the so-called "extremists" or with the "moderates", with the "zealots" or with the "compromisers".

Of course, it cannot be denied that it is possible to "jump the gun" and abandon the world too soon. St. Paul wrote to warn the Thessalonian Christians who had already abandoned their jobs in anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ that this would not happen before the removal of "him who restrains" (lawful monarchical power, according to the holy Fathers) and the great apostasy (II Thessalonians 2.1-7). Again, the 19th century Romanian saint, Callinicus of Cernica, stopped building a church because he thought that the end of the world was near – until an angel appeared to him and told him that there was still time to build churches. Again, in 1962 St. John Maximovich is reported as having declared that the Antichrist had just been born…

These were mistakes, but they were mistakes engendered by highly sensitive consciences acutely aware of the increase of corruption in the world. Such a mistake is less dangerous than the opposite one of underestimating the growth of apocalyptic evil. Indeed, there are far more scriptural passages warning against false optimism in this respect than against excessive pessimism (cf. I Thessalonians 5.3-4). And it goes without saying that as time passes and we come closer to the end, the signs of the times come to match the signs given in the Scriptures more and more closely, making the

possibility that such-and-such a phenomenon is in fact the seal of the Antichrist that much greater. As Fr. Seraphim Rose used to say: it is later than we think…

The Jordanville Monk Vsevolod, in an article quoted at length by our anonymous author, considers that while the new identity cards are probably not the seal of the Antichrist, they may well be a *preparation* for it. This conclusion is less comforting than it sounds; in fact, it implies that we have every reason to approach these identity cards and similar objects with great caution. For who knows at what time the preparation for the seal will turn into the seal itself, especially since the "trial" seal will be very close to the final, "real" seal in form?

The question is: how will we know when a certain technology has ceased to be a mere preparation for the seal, and is the seal itself? At this point it must be emphasized, as St. Gregory Palamas reminds us, that no number *of itself* is evil, for the whole creation, and therefore all numbers, were created good by God.[537] An external mark or number only becomes evil – in this we can fully agree with our anonymous author - when its reception is bound up with inner apostasy from Christ. In other words, it is not the number 666 *as such* which destroys the soul, but the apostasy from Christ which is the condition of receiving the seal of that number and the material benefits that go with it.

Thus, as Monk Sergius writes, "as long as we do not deny Christ with knowledge, we should not be afraid of various technologies, not even if they should inject '666' into our blood system!"[538]

At some point, therefore, the use of this technology will be bound up with certain *conditions*, conditions which it will be impossible for an Orthodox Christian to accept. As far as the present writer knows, no such conditions are attached – yet – to the use of any of the technologies in question; and it is idle to speculate precisely what these conditions will be. Of one thing, however, we can be certain in advance: that the revelation that the conditions attached to the use of this technology are unacceptable will be more likely to be given to those who have always treated it with the greatest suspicion and have kept away from it even when it was not strictly necessary (because no conditions were attached to its use) than to those who have looked down on their more cautious brothers with scarcely concealed disdain, and who may therefore have ceased to notice that, little by little and in the most clever and insidious way, an originally neutral, even beneficial technology has become the instrument of their damnation.

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[537] St. Gregory Palamas, Migne, *P.G.* 151, 224; *E.P.E.* 9, 492. Quoted in Archimandrite Emmanuel Kalyva, *The Seal of the Antichrist*, Athens, 1989, p. 86 (in Greek).

[538] Monk Sergius of Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, to Subdeacon Paul Inglesby, July 28 / August 10, 2000.

Conclusion

In 1917 the world entered the era of the Antichrist. "He who restrains", Orthodox monarchical power, was removed, the great apostasy began and Jewish antichristian power emerged from the underground into the foreground of world history. Since then, the possibility has been ever present that, together with the Antichrist, his seal, too, would appear – not tomorrow, not in generations to come, but today. This fact does not exclude the further possibility that the onslaught of the Antichrist may be temporarily weakened, even turned back, for a period before the end, and that, as some prophecies indicate, there will be a resurrection of the Orthodox empire "for a short time". But *in general* the spiritual condition of mankind in the era of the Antichrist will sharply deteriorate, according to the holy fathers, which must make us especially vigilant with regard to the fulfilment of the prophecies contained in the Apocalypse.

The Soviet era was the first era in history in which the majority of Orthodox Christians have had to live for an extended period in a state not established by God and not recognized, but rather anathematized, by the Church – that is, in a state of *anarchy* which the Apocalypse calls *the beast*. As such, it is called the era of the collective Antichrist, in contrast to the era of the personal Antichrist, which is yet to come and which will spread over the whole earth. Being the Antichrist, Soviet power had its seal – those forms of legalization and commemoration which entailed the individual Christian's or church organization's recognition of the state as God-established and lawful.

The decade since the fall of Soviet power has been an enigmatic period full of conflicting signs whose overall interpretation is not yet clear. On the one hand, an opportunity has been presented to the broad masses of the Russian people to learn the truth and join the True Church. On the other hand, this opportunity has been seized so far by only a small minority, there has been no return to Orthodox forms of official ecclesiastical and political life, and the indications are that the advent of the personal Antichrist, the false king of the Jews, is being prepared. These indications include: the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948; the spread of American-Western-Jewish civilization throughout the world; and the rise in influence of Talmudic Judaism and the bowing before it of most of the world's religions. Now again, as in the generation before the First Coming of Christ, the land of Israel is at the centre of world history, and the world as a whole is filled with the tense expectation of a coming saviour – only that saviour will be the Antichrist rather than Christ.

In view of this, it is only natural that the appearance of the apocalyptic number 666 in a series of technologies spread and controlled by the dominant American-Western-Jewish civilization should have led many God-fearing Christians to conclude that "the end is near, even at the doors" (Matthew 24.23), and that "those who are in Judaea" – that is, within the sphere of influence of the New World Order and its "seals" – should "flee to the

mountains" (Matthew 24.16) – that is, have nothing to do with these technologies or with the mysterious international powers that issue them.

Nevertheless, in the very tentative and humble opinion of the present writer, ***these technologies are not the seal of the Antichrist itself, but a preparation for it.***

This conclusion is based on the following considerations: (1) *so far* no conditions unacceptable to the Christian conscience have been attached to the use of these technologies; (2) the American-Western-Jewish civilization that uses them is in fact much weaker than may appear and is on the point of collapse (cf. the prophecy of Elder Aristocles of Moscow and Mount Athos: "America will feed the world, but will finally collapse"); (3) in consequence, the possibility of a recovery of a truly Orthodox empire and civilization, as indicated by many prophecies, is in fact much stronger than may appear; which (4) accords with the possibility, indicated by certain other prophecies, that the Antichrist, though a Jew, will in fact come, not from a pagan, heretical or Jewish background, but from an *Orthodox Christian* environment (Russia) and will try to imitate Orthodoxy in both his religion and his statehood.

However, in view of the uncertainty of the above conclusion, and of the abundant exhortations to watchfulness contained in the writings of the holy apostles and fathers, it is safer to draw the following, somewhat different conclusion: ***that whether or not we believe that the modern forms of identification are the seal of the Antichrist, the opinion of those zealots of Orthodoxy who believe that they are should be respected and in no way rejected or ignored.*** After all, it was these same zealots who refused to take Soviet passports as being the seal of the collective Antichrist, who kept the flame of the true understanding of the Soviet beast alive in the last years of Soviet power, who were that "salt" which kept the last remnants of True Orthodoxy in Russia from being corrupted. And if their watchfulness was so vital in the past, it may well be so again in the future. For blessed is he "who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near…" (Revelation 1.3).

Suzdal.
September 14/27, 2000.

(This is a revised and slightly expanded version of the original article published in Russian in *Suzdal'skie Eparkhial'nie Vedomosti (Suzdal Diocesan News)*, № 10, April-November, 2000, pp. 22-30)

APPENDIX 3. HAS THE REIGN OF THE ANTICHRIST BEGUN?

For several decades now, beginning in some of the Protestant Churches, and spreading to the Orthodox, there has been speculation that the reign of the Antichrist has begun, and that his servants are already being sealed with his seal and with the number "666". There has been no agreement about what the seal of the beast really is, nor about the meaning of his number. Nor has any Orthodox Church Council given an authoritative interpretation of the thirteenth to twentieth chapters of Revelation and their symbols – the first beast, the second beast, the horns and heads of the beast, his seal and image and number, the whore of Babylon, etc. In spite of this absence of authoritative interpretation and guidance, schisms have already begun to appear on this soil in more than one Orthodox country. This is a tragic phenomenon, and would appear to make a fresh attempt to achieve clarity and consensus on this question urgent.

However, we have to accept from the beginning: God may have deliberately concealed the interpretation of these texts because the time is not ripe, because the Antichrist in his last, personal incarnation, has *not* yet appeared. If so, then any attempt to fix the correct interpretation may be not only premature, but harmful and impious because bound to be mistaken. After all, did not the holy theologian, speaking in the Holy Spirit, say: "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast" (Revelation 13.18)? In other words, a special gift of wisdom, of spiritual understanding, is required in order to understand this mystery. And who, in our corrupt generation can claim to have that gift, which was not given to the Holy Fathers of earlier generations and has not been given to the leaders of the Church in the present generation? It is precisely for this reason that no attempt will be made in this article to provide a definitive answer to the question: who (or what) is the beast, and what is the meaning of his number? Instead, a different, but perhaps more necessary question will be addressed: do we have good reason to believe that we have reached the very last times of the world? More precisely: have all the prophecies relating to the times *preceding* the appearance of the Antichrist already been fulfilled?

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One of the most recent saints of the Orthodox Church, Holy New Martyr James (Arkatov) of the Altai in Siberia (+1991), who had the gift of prophecy, once said in conversation with some Old Ritualists: "You have already been talking for an hour about the coming Antichrist, but allow me to ask you: to what seal or trumpet or cup, or in general to what powers, do you relate this [Soviet] regime under which we are living?" At first the guests were perplexed by the presence of a stranger, and even the master of the house was embarrassed. One of them said: "If you want to say something, say it."

Then James briefly expounded his understanding of the basic prophecies. “First, all the prophecies spoke not only about one time of the reign of the Antichrist, but about three sections of the last times: the first was called ‘the beginning of sorrows’, according to the prophetic word of the Saviour, or ‘apostasy’, according to the Apostle Paul, and in the Revelation of the Apostle John it is referred to as the coming out and reign of the beast from the sea with his head-followers. The second section of the last times is ‘the beast was and is not’ or the time of the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world, and, finally, the third period, which is in fact the time of the enthronement of the Antichrist. The Saviour calls it ‘the end’, the beginning of which is the placing of ‘the abomination of desolation’ or the coming ‘out of the beast from the abyss’ (St. John the Theologian), who is the eighth in number in the dynasty of the beasts and is of the number of the seven, or the appearance of ‘the man of sin’ (St. Paul the Apostle). As for the ‘whore’, is it not clear to you that this image refers to a traitor-church that has betrayed Christ, that which should be ‘the bride of Christ’, but which has been united with the scarlet beast? In the Apocalypse there are three ‘women’, and all three signify the Church, it is only by their clothes and their activity that we can distinguish them: on the way into the wilderness she is clothed in the sun, but there she is divided into her who is clothed in scarlet and her who goes out to meet Christ, clothed in pure white, which is the righteousness of the saints.” [539]

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[539] “□□□ □□ □□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□ □ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□, □ □□□□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□: □ □□□□□ □□□□□□, □□□□□ □□□ □□□□, □□□ □□□□□□ □ □□□□□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□, □□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□?" □□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□ □ □□□□□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□, □ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□□□. □□ □□□□□□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□, □ □□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□□□: "□□□□ □□ □□□□□□ □□□-□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□, □□□□□□". □□□□□ □□□□ □ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□. □□-□□□□□□, □□□ □□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□ □□ □□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□, □□ □ □□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□: □□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□ "□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□", □□ □□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□□, □□□ "□□□□□□□□□□□□□", □□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□, □ □ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□, □□□ □□□□□ □ □□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□ □ □□□ □□□□□□□□-□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□. □□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□ "□□□□□ □□□ □ □□□ □□□" □□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□ □□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□□, □, □□□□□□□, □□□□□□ □□□□□□, □□□□□□□□□□□□□, □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□. □□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□ "□□□□□□", □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□ "□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□", □□□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□□ - □□□□□□□□ "□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□", □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□ □ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □ □□ □□□□□ □□□□, □ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□ - □□□□□□□□□ "□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□". "□ □ "□□□□□□□□□", □□□□□ □□□ □□ □□□□, □□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□-□□□□□□□□□□, □□, □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ "□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□", □ □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□ . □ □□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□ "□□□□", □ □□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□, □□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□ □□ □□ □□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□: □□ □□□□□ □ □□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□□ □ □□□□□□□, □ □□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□ □□, □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □ □□□□□□□□□□, □ □□, □□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □ □□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□, □□□□□□□□□□□ □ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □ □□□□□□□□, □□□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□.

And so the holy martyr divides the last times into three stages: (1) the Soviet period, which began in 1917 and has not fully come to an end yet; (2) the Triumph of Orthodoxy, which will see the spread of the True Faith throughout the world for a short time; and (3) the reign of the Antichrist.

St. James' schema was not unique to himself: many saints of the Russian Catacomb Church expressed similar thoughts. All agreed that the abdication of the tsar, "he who restrains", according to St. Paul (II Thessalonians 2.7), marked the beginning of the last times, the reign of the Antichrist. However, Soviet power was not the Antichrist in the literal, personal sense, but the *collective* Antichrist. He had his own seals, the red star and the hammer and sickle, if not his own number. He had his own "abomination of desolation", "priests" appointed by himself, whom he put in the churches of God to defile them. And all those who were sealed with his seal in the spiritual sense – that is, accepted communism, or did not resist it spiritually – fell away from Christ. As for the "whore", this was the false church of the Sovietized Moscow Patriarchate, which, by accepting the joys and sorrows of the collective Antichrist as its own joys and sorrows, had clearly accepted his seal and fallen away from Christ and Orthodoxy.

But the Catacomb saints did not believe that the period of Soviet power, or the collective Antichrist, would be followed immediately by "the end", the reign of the personal Antichrist, the false king of the Jews. On the contrary: they believed that after the violent overthrow of Soviet power (in a war with China, according to several elders) True Orthodoxy would be re-established in Russia under a True Orthodox tsar. Moreover, some also believed that this would lead to the spread of Orthodoxy throughout the world, in accordance with the words of the Lord: "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; *and then* shall the end come" (Matthew 24.14). For, as St. John Maximovich (+1966) once explained, this prophecy of the Lord has not yet been fulfilled. "The Gospel of the Kingdom" must refer to the *Orthodox* Gospel, and not to Catholic or Protestant heresies; and we cannot say that the Orthodox Gospel has yet been preached to all nations.

In fact, if we include the pre-revolutionary saints who prophesied the fall and resurrection of Russia, we have a "great cloud of witnesses" who clearly imply that today, in the year 2007, we have *not* yet reached "the end", the reign of the personal Antichrist, and that many great – and greatly joyful – events have to take place before his coming: Monk Abel the Prophet, Elder Seraphim of Sarov, Elder Porphyrius of Glinsk, the Elders of Valaam, Elder Barnabas of Gethsemane Skete, Righteous John of Kronstadt, Elder Aristocles of Moscow, Martyr-Eldress Dunyushka of Siberia, Hieromartyr Andronicus of Perm, Elder Anatolius of Optina, Elder Alexis (Mechev) of Moscow, Elder Nectarius of Optina, Martyr-Eldress Agatha of Belorussia, Elder Theodosius of Minvody and others.

So why do people find it so difficult to believe that there can be any improvement before the end, and insist that the very last days, the reign of the personal Antichrist, are upon us already?

*

Many saints believed that they were living just before the end. We may recall two fairly recent examples. In 1848 St. Callinicus of Cernica in Romania decided not to build a church because he believed that the end was so near, and was only persuaded to build it by the appearance to him of Saints Nicholas and George. Again, St. John Maximovich believed that the Antichrist had been born in 1962…

Paradoxically, such a mistake is more characteristic of saints than of sinners because saints feel the growth of evil around them more acutely; their spiritual senses are trained to feel the increase in iniquity and the love of many growing cold, whereas sinners, being immersed in evil, are less sensitive to this. And there is no doubt that evil has grown today to unprecedented proportions. This fact, combined with the weakening of the Church on earth, and its ever-increasing divisions, must lead the deeply thinking Christian to wonder: how long can this continue? "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6.10).

These words were spoken by "the souls of them that were slain for the word of God" (Revelation 6.9), and remind us of another fact that is too easily forgotten: that our age has produced not only the greatest evil, *but also the greatest good* – in the form of the hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of martyrs that have shone forth, especially in Russia, but also in other lands. Now in earlier ages periods of martyrdom have always been followed by periods of missionary expansion, in accordance with the principle: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Thus the martyrs of the Roman catacombs produced the vast expansion of the Church in the time of St. Constantine the Great, and the martyrs of the iconoclast period produced the conversion of the Slavic lands. Why should not the holy new martyrs and confessors of Russia bring forth a still greater harvest of souls?

One harvest of souls that is clearly prophesied before the end is that of *the Jews.* St. Paul writes: "Blindness in part is come to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles come in. And so shall all Israel be saved. As it is written: There shall come out of Zion the deliverer, who will turn away impiety from Israel" (Romans 11.25-26). This prophecy has certainly not been fulfilled yet.

Some argue that this is impossible because it is precisely the Jews who destroyed the Russian empire and who are controlling the present descent of the world into the depths of depravity and anti-Christianity. But does not the example of St. Paul himself persuade us that the Lord is capable of making

the greatest sinners into the greatest saints? And would not the conversion of the Jews be the greatest demonstration of God's long-suffering mercy?

Again, others argue that the Jews will be converted only during the reign of the Antichrist. However, St. Paul says that the sign for the conversion of the Jews will not be the reign of the Antichrist but the "coming in of the fullness of the Gentiles" – that is, the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world. This spiritual resurrection of the Jews will not be total, and a large part of them will again apostasize and follow the Antichrist; but the fact of the resurrection cannot be denied and must modify our attitude towards this race, which, though cursed by God, has nevertheless not been totally abandoned by Him, and has been preserved in existence when many other nations have perished.

And who will convert the Jews if not the Russians, who have suffered so much from them, but whose history and culture has become the history and culture of a large part of the Jewish race itself (one sixth of all Israelis are Russian Jews)? If this seems fantastic in view of the present collapse of Russian civilization, let us remember the interpretation of a passage from the book of the Apocalypse given by the holy new Hieromartyr Bishop Mark (Novoselov): "[St. John] with complete clarity speaks about the conversion of the God-fighting people to the Church of Christ, when she, few in numbers and powerless from an external point of view, but powerful with an inner strength and faithfulness to her Lord (Revelation 3.8) will draw to herself the 'remnant' of the God-fighting tribe. 'Behold, says the Lord to the Angel of the Church of Philadelphia, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and make obeisance before they feet, and to know that I have loved thee.'

"Gazing with the eye of faith at what the Lord has done, and applying the ear of our heart and mind to the events of our days, comparing that which is seen and heard with the declarations of the Word of God, I cannot but feel that a great, wonderful and joyous mystery of God's economy is coming towards us: the Judaizing haters and persecutors of the Church of God, who are striving to subdue and annihilate her, by the wise permission of Providence will draw her to purification and strengthening, so as 'to present her [to Christ] as a glorious Church, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she should be holy and blameless' (Ephesians 6.27).

"And in His time, known only to the One Lord of time, this, according to the son of thunder's strict expression 'synagogue of Satan' will bow before the pure Bride of Christ, conquered by her holiness and blamelessness and, perhaps, frightened by the image of the Antichrist. And if the rejection of the Apostle Paul's fellow-countrymen was, in his words, 'the reconciliation of the

world, what will be their acceptance if not life from the dead?' (Romans 11.15)."[540]

The famous monarchist writer Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov agrees with this interpretation: "Is this conversion of the Jews that salvation of 'all Israel' which the Apostle Paul foretold? In the Apocalypse it is said that the saved will come 'of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie'. But not the whole of the 'synagogue' will come, but only 'of the synagogue', that is, a part of it. But even here, where the Apostle Paul says that 'the whole of Israel will be saved', he means only a part: 'for they are not all Israel, which are of Israel… They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed' (Romans 9.6,8).

"The opinion is widespread among us that the conversion of the Jews will take place at the very appearance of the Saviour, when they shall cry out: 'Blessed is He That cometh in the name of the Lord'. But this is not evident from the Apocalypse. But if the Philadelphian conversion will bring 'all Israel' that is to be saved to Christ, then this will, of course, be a great event, fully explaining the rejoicing of the Heavens. Israel is a chosen people with whom it will not be possible to find a comparison when he begins to do the work of God. The Jews will, of course, multiply the forces of Christianity for the resistance against the Antichrist. 'If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world,' says the Apostle Paul, 'what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?' (Romans 11.15)."[541]

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And so our answer to the question: "Has the Reign of the Antichrist Begun?" is: "Not yet: many prophecies concerning the resurrection of Orthodoxy before the end have not yet been fulfilled, and even if it is difficult, in the present, extraordinarily corrupt state of the world, to see how this could possibly happen, it is necessary to believe the Word of God and the prophecies of the saints more than our own ears and eyes; for 'with God all things are possible'".

But the objection will arise: what about the bar-codes, the passports, the bio-chips – all the technology which seems, for the first time in history, to show in a concrete manner how the prophecy concerning the seal of the Antichrist could be fulfilled? We are not denying that the Antichrist, when he comes, may well use this technology, or its more sophisticated successor, to seal his servants. But ***the appearance of the technology is not the same as the fulfilment of the prophecy.*** Here we must be wise, as the son of thunder

[540] Novoselov, *Pisma k Druziam (Letters to Friends)*, Moscow, 1994, p. 125 (in Russian).
[541] Tikhomirov, *Religioznie-Filosofskie Osnovy Istorii (The Religio-Philosophical Foundations of History)*, Moscow, 1997, p. 570 (in Russian).

warns. We must not take a shadow, or foreshadowing of the truth, for the truth itself.

Let us consider first: is the number "666" evil in itself? The answer, according to St. Gregory Palamas, is: no; this number, like all the other numbers, has been created by God, and so is good. [542] What is evil is not the number itself, but the end to which it is used.

How will it be used? We know from the Holy Fathers that the seal will be used as a sign that the person sealed willingly and consciously accepts and believes in the Antichrist. Thus St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher prophesied: "On the seal will be written the following: 'I am yours.' 'Yes, you are mine.' 'I go willingly, not by force.' 'And I accept you in accordance with your will, and not by force.' These are four utterances, or inscriptions, which will be written in the middle of this accursed seal..."

Now has anyone discovered that these four inscriptions are to be found on any modern technological device? As far as the present writer knows, the answer to that question is: no. In any case, such inscriptions make no sense before the appearance of the Antichrist himself. For what does "I am yours" mean if we do not know who "you" is? It follows that before the actual appearance of the Antichrist, and the people's willing and conscious acceptance of him as the true King of the Jews and God, the prophecy cannot be fulfilled.

At the same time, the appearance of the technology is undoubtedly *a sign of the times* (Matthew 16.3), a sign that we are approaching the end, and that we must prepare ourselves spiritually for the coming of the Antichrist.

The world has probably been close to the end many times before – for example, in the time of Julian the Apostate, who tried to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. But each time the Lord has delivered the world from the Antichrist. As L.A. Tikhomirov writes: "In history there have been times when the pressure of evil has been so strong that it seemed that there was no further reason for the world to exist, and if the anti-God mood had become finally entrenched then the end of the world would have come. The multitude of small 'potential' antichrists, of whom the Apostle John already spoke, would immediately have promoted from their midst someone capable of growing into the real Antichrist. Such epochs, of which ours is one, in their character truly constitute the last times. But are they chronologically the last? We cannot know that, because if the free will of men, amazed by the disgusting sight of the abomination of desolation in the holy place, strives again towards God, the Antichrist, already ready to enter the world, will again be cast into the abyss until conditions more favourable for him arise, while the Lord will

[542] St. Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151, 224; *E.P.E.* 9, 492.

again lengthen the term of life of the world so that new members should be prepared for the Kingdom of God."[543]

One day, however, the Antichrist will indeed come, and we will have to be prepared. And even now, before his appearance, we must still be prepared, because we can receive the seal of one of his forerunners. So the appearance of signs of the times, and signs of the end, is God's mercy to us, a wake-up call, a call to vigilance which must not be ignored.

Let us recall the context of St. Paul's words on the Antichrist in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. Many Thessalonians were so convinced that the Second Coming of Christ was at hand that they had even stopped working. St. Paul considered this harmful, and asked them "not to be quickly shaken from your mind, nor to be disturbed, neither through a spirit, nor through a word, nor through a letter supposedly from us, that the Day of the Lord has come. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless there is first the apostasy and the man of sin, the son of destruction, is revealed…" (2.2-3).

These words are a warning also for us. Although we are, of course, much closer to the reign of the Antichrist and the Second Coming of Christ than the Thessalonians in the first century, nevertheless we also must not "be shaken from our minds" and believe that these events are already upon us when they are not. Technology alone can never separate us from Christ. We can be separated from Christ only by *willingly and consciously* accepting a lie – a heresy like ecumenism, or an evil leader like the Antichrist. The importance of the seal consists in its being an outward and visible sign of this inward and invisible apostasy. The seal will be destructive for those who receive it, because it will be a sign of their acceptance of the heresy of the Antichrist. But the seal has no power on its own – that is, before the appearance of the heresy and before anyone has consciously accepted it.

There is a danger that in our eschatological speculations we may, like the Jews, become fixated on the letter (or number) of the law while completely ignoring its spirit, its inner content, and so fall away from the true faith. That this is a real danger is shown by the fact that recently some zealot monks, in their zeal to avoid what they consider to be the seal of the Antichrist, have broken communion with a truly confessing bishop who does not accept their eschatology and joined a heretical bishop who does. In other words, in order to avoid a future heresy that has not yet appeared and has not yet been identified and condemned by the Church, they have embraced a past heresy (Apollinarianism) that was identified and condemned centuries ago! In the same way, many Orthodox Christians today claim to see the Antichrist in many phenomena – in new passports and globalization, in American foreign policy and the European Union – but completely fail to see that their ecumenist hierarchs are heretics who are leading them into the abyss of the

[543] Tikhomirov, op. cit., p. 539.

Church's condemnation. Truly they are "blind guides who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel" (Matthew 23.24)!

May the Lord grant us that most valuable of gifts, the gift of *discernment,* so that we may discern the signs of the times, not selectively and not in the wrong order, but in conformity with the witness of Holy Scripture and Tradition *as a whole*. For, as St. John Chrysostom says, it is those who do not have this depth of Scriptural knowledge who will bow down to the Antichrist…

May 20 / June 2, 2007.
Apodosis of Pentecost.

(Published in *Vernost'*, no. 86)

APPENDIX 4. THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES
THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

The Gospel for the great feast of Pentecost begins with the words: **In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water** (John 7.37-38). What is this feast that is here referred to? We should expect that it would be the Jewish feast of Pentecost, of which the Christian feast of Pentecost is the fulfilment. But no: the feast referred to is the feast of *Tabernacles*, the third of the great feasts of the Jewish year. The question, therefore, arises: why, on the Christian feast of Pentecost, should our attention be drawn in this way to the Jewish feast of Tabernacles? There is nothing accidental in the Holy Scriptures, and certainly not in the Gospel readings for the great feasts. So there must be some lesson for us here…

In the Old Testament the Lord commanded the Jews to go up to the Temple to worship three times in the year: at the spring feast of Unleavened Bread (Pascha), at the early summer feast of Weeks, also known as the feast of Harvest, and at the autumn feast of Tabernacles (Succoth), also known as the feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23.14-17; Deuteronomy 16.16). The first two feasts are, of course, well known to us in their Christian fulfilment as the feasts of Pascha and Pentecost, during which we commemorate the most important events of our salvation – the Death and Resurrection of Christ, and the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. But much less is known and written about the third and final great feast of the Jewish year, the feast of Tabernacles...

Since the first two great feasts have received their Christian fulfilment, and since the feast of Tabernacles was on a par with these feasts, are we entitled to expect a Christian fulfilment of Tabernacles also? For, as Jean Daniélou writes, "although the Jewish feast of Tabernacles has not been carried on into the Christian liturgy of today, this feast was seen by the Fathers of the Church as a figure of Christian realities."[544] If so, what is this fulfilment likely to be? Since the patristic references to this feast are few and short, we cannot answer these questions with certainty. Nevertheless, it will be worth gathering what information we have from the Holy Scriptures and Holy Fathers, and offering a very tentative hypothesis as to the feast's meaning.

In Leviticus (23.26-43; cf. Numbers 29.7-38), the climax of the Jewish church year begins with the tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri – approximately, September-October), when the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) is celebrated. **And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God.... It shall be a Sabbath of Sabbaths for you, and you shall humble your souls.** Then, five

[544] Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966, p. 333.

days later, begins the feast of Tabernacles: **On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast to the Lord for seven days; on the first day there shall be a rest, and on the eighth day a rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the ripe fruit of a tree, leaves of palm trees, the branches of leafy trees, and the pure willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It shall be an ordinance forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.**

The feast of Tabernacles lasted for eight days, longer than any other feast. The eighth, **last and great day of the feast** (John 7.37), was the "crowning feast of all the feasts of the year," in the words of Philo the Alexandrian.[545] It means "the completion and fulfilment of all the feasts", according to St. Gregory Palamas.[546]

The eighth day, of course, is suggestive of the Lord's Day, the day of the resurrection; and Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Ohrid develops this as follows: "The feast of the tabernacles suggests to us the resurrection, when the fruits of our deeds are gathered for spiritual harvest, and the tabernacles of our bodies – dissolved at death into their constituent elements – are reconstructed."[547]

In agreement with this are the words of St. Methodius of Olympus, who writes: "Only those who have celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles will enter into the holy land. Leaving their tabernacles, they hasten to arrive in the Temple and the City of God, that is to say, to a joy more great and more heavenly, as it took place among the Jews in the figures of these things. In the same way, indeed, as, having come out of the borders of Egypt, they, by journeying, came to tabernacles and, from there, having advanced still further, they reached the Promised land, so is it with us. I also, having started on the journey, I come out of the Egypt of this life, I come first to the Resurrection, to the true Scenopegia [feast of Tabernacles]. There, having built my beautiful tent on the first day of the feast, that of the judgement, I celebrate the feast with Christ during the millenium of rest, called the seven days, the true Sabbaths. Then, following Jesus Who has crossed the heavens, I start on my journey again, as they, after the rest of the Feast of Tabernacles, journeyed

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[545] David Baron, *Commentary on Zechariah*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1918, 1988, p. 527.

[546] St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 17,* 12. Christopher Veniamin writes: "It is in fact the Feast of Tabernacles that refers to 'the eighth day' as the exodion – lit. *The time of going out* or *departure,* and thus *a commemoration of Exodus* (*The Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas*, Canaan, Penn.: St. Tychon's Seminary Press, vol. 1, 2002, p. 313).

[547] *The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to John by Blessed Theophylact,* House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 2007, p. 118,

toward the land of promise, the heavens, not waiting any longer in tabernacles, that is to say, my tabernacle not remaining any longer the same, but, after the millenium, having passed from a corruptible human form to an angelic grandeur and beauty. Then, going out from the place of tabernacles, having celebrated the feast of the Resurrection, we shall go towards better things, ascending to the house that is above the heavens."[548]

So the basic spiritual theme of the feast of Tabernacles is *resurrection*, the renewal of our earthly bodies, or tabernacles, at the General Resurrection. And this gives us our first clue as to the link between the feasts of Pentecost and Tabernacles. For it is the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that makes possible the resurrection both of the soul and of the body; Pentecost looks forward to Tabernacles as its final fulfilment, the last day of the feast, as it were, when the Spirit, being no longer simply an "earnest" of our salvation, as St. Paul says, brings forth Its final fruit in the resurrection of the dead.

However, there is reason to believe that this explanation does not exhaust the full meaning of the feast. The Jewish feasts of Pascha and Pentecost were fulfilled *in time*, and in time for the Church to institute liturgical services in order to commemorate the temporal events commemorated in them. Should we not expect the same of the feast of Tabernacles? But the resurrection of the dead is an event that will take place at the end of time, bringing time to an end. So could it not be that the Christian fulfilment of the feast of Tabernacles, in addition to celebrating the imminent General Resurrection, will also commemorate some other resurrection taking place in time and before the General Resurrection?

This hypothesis is greatly strengthened by the fact that, according to the Holy Scriptures, the Christian fulfilment of the feast of Tabernacles will indeed be celebrated in time, and throughout the world. Thus in the Prophet Zechariah we read: **And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came up against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the feast of Tabernacles** (14.16-19).

Now it is evident that the prophet is here speaking, not of the Jewish feast of Tabenacles, but of its future, worldwide fulfilment in Christ. It is also evident that this fulfilment will take place in time, *before* the General

[548] St. Methodius, *The Banquet*, IX, 5:120.

Resurrection. So what clues do we have as to what the temporal event it commemorates could be?

Since this prophecy comes in the prophecy of Zechariah, we might expect the clue to lie in the previous chapters of that prophecy. So let as look at it more closely, and especially at its last three chapters, which describe a series of very important events taking place first of all in Israel, and then on a worldwide scale, in the last days. It is tempting to allegorize these events as referring to events, not in the physical land of Israel, but in the Church, in accordance with the exegetical principle that "Israel" refers to "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6.16) – that is, the Church.[549] But, useful and convincing as such an allegorical interpretation is in other passages from the prophets, it is much less convincing here, where the details appear to be far too concrete to allow it.

Although much is unclear, this much is evident: that there will be a formidable coalition of nations against Israel, which will be destroyed. At this time, whether during or after the war, the Jews will repent profoundly of their apostasy from Christ, the True Messiah and King of Israel. **I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and compassion; and they shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced** [this is the Hebrew quoted in John 19.37; the Greek is: **because they have mocked Me**], **and they shall make lamentation for Him, as for a beloved Friend, and they shall grieve intensely, as for a First-Born Son** (12.10). The false prophets and shepherds will be cast out. Nevertheless, two out of three in the land will die (13.8). As for the city itself, it **will be taken, the houses plundered, the women defiled, and half of the city will go forth into exile; but the rest of My people will not be utterly cut of from the city.** (14.2) But of the third of the population that comes through the fiery trial, the Lord will say: **He shall call upon My name, and I will hear him, and I will say, 'This is My people', and they will say, 'The Lord is my God'.** (13.9) **And on that day His feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives** (14.4), which will be split in two. There will be an earthquake as in the time of King Uzziah, **and the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with Him** (14.6). In that day there will be no light, **but towards evening there will be light** (14.7). **And the Lord shall be King of all the earth** (14.9), and **He will strike all the nations, as many as made war against Jerusalem. Their flesh shall be eaten away as they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall pour out of their sockets, and their tongue shall melt away in their mouth** (14.12). And then **everyone that survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to**

[549] A useful rule of interpretation in this context has been provided by Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov), who writes: "The people of Israel are called both Jacob and Israel after the name of their forefather, who was named Jacob at birth and renamed Israel after he had been counted worthy of the vision of God; [but] in the spiritual sense Christians who have made significant spiritual progress are called Israel" ("On the Judgements of God", in the *Collected Works* (in Russian)).

Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, there will be no rain upon them. And if the family of Egypt do not go up and present themselves, then upon them shall come the plague with which the Lord afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles… (14.16-17).

Apocalyptic although these events undoubtedly are, they clearly are not describing the end of the world or the general resurrection, but rather a terrible war (the melting of the eyes in the soldiers' sockets suggests a nuclear war) followed by a great revival of the faith after the war. For even after the appearance of Christ on the Mount of Olives, there is no mention of any general judgement or resurrection, still less of entrance into a Heavenly Kingdom, but rather of the continuation of life on this corruptible earth. In particular, we see the celebration on earth of a new feast by most, but not all of the nations on the earth.

So what could this Christianized Feast of Tabernacles be celebrating? First of all, we suggest, the "ingathering" of the Jews into the Church that was prophesied by St. Paul in Romans 9 to 11, and which he called **life from the dead** (Romans 11.15). Secondly, it refers also the ingathering of **the fullness of the Gentiles** (Romans 11.25). Thus the Feast of Tabernacles will indeed be the feast of the "ingathering" of the whole Church, when the fullness both of the Gentiles and of the penitent Jews, will enter the Church. After the horrors of Armageddon and world war, the people of God will be granted a period of rest and joy, in which they will celebrate the feast in preparation for the final battle against the Antichrist and in anticipation of the more complete victory that will take place at the Second Coming of Christ and the General Resurrection.

The Lord may have been referring to this joyful event when He said to the impenitent Jews: **Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord** (Matthew 23.38-39). For **Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord** is the verse sung at the climax of the Feast of Tabernacles. It is as if the Lord were saying: "You will not see Me with the eyes of faith until you are converted and participate with the whole of the New Testament Church in the Christian fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles."

St. John of Kronstadt has the same interpretation. The verses Matthew 23.38-39, he says, "mean: I will cease to be your Messiah until you recognize Me as such. In the meantime I will reveal My Face to the Gentiles, who have not heard about Me. The holy Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans (11.25) announces that **the hardening has taken place in Israel in part until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in.** And this, as is evident from the Revelation of St. John the Theologian, will take place in the sixth period of the last ages, when terrible times will come accompanied by great astronomical signs and unusual physical phenomena. Then the whole of the true Israel, in the number determined in the Apocalypse, will be saved, that is, will believe in Christ as their Messiah and God. The remaining Jews will become still more

hardened and will recognize the Antichrist, as their messiah, king and god."[550]

Thus the Feast of Tabernacles celebrates a kind of "resurrection before the Resurrection", an ingathering of the last good fruits of both the Jews and the Gentiles, a period of rest for the Church before her last battle with the Antichrist, her crossing the river of the Last Judgement, and her ascent to the Heavenly Jerusalem, where she puts on the tabernacle of the Resurrection Body.

Daniélou points out that the liturgy of the feast of Tabernacles is similar to the liturgy of Palm Sunday [notably in the use of the verse, **Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord**], which is a similar "resurrection before the Resurrection" and - to the liturgical rites described in the Apocalypse. "The whole liturgy of the Feast of Tabernacles serves St. John in the Apocalypse to describe the procession of the elect around the heavenly altar. It is, in fact, the liturgy of this Feast which we are to recognize in the passage of the Apocalypse (7.9-17) describing the **great crowd** which stands before the throne of the Lamb. Many details are connected with the Feast: the palm-branches ('phoiniches') in their hands, the white robes, which recall the garments of Christ at the Transfiguration (7.9), the tabernacle in which the Lord dwells in the midst of the elect ('scenosei') (7.15), the springs of living water where they quench their thirst (7.17). We have here, on the second level of eschatology, the projection of the first fulfillment which was, on the level of the Gospel, the episode of Palm Sunday..."[551]

The liturgical links between the Feast of Tabernacles and Palm Sunday reflect a profound prophetic parallelism; for as on Palm Sunday, so on the future Feast of the Tabernacles, the Jews acclaim Christ as the Messiah and their true king - temporarily. But just as Palm Sunday was followed by Great Friday and the Crucifixion of Christ, when the Jews who had hailed Christ five days before called for His death, saying "Crucify Him!", so the same race of the Jews, after turning to Christ after the World War and joining the Church in fulfilment of the prophecies (Romans 11), and after participating with the Christian Gentiles in the Christian Feast of Tabernacles, will turn against Him again to worship the Antichrist, in fulfilment of many other prophecies. For it is of this, the Jewish worship of the Antichrist at the end of time, that the Lord says: **I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive** (John 5.43).

There are several other Old Testament prophecies that refer to the conversion of the Jews towards the end of the world, **the turning again of the heart of the fathers to the sons** (Malachi 4.5). They all involve a return of the

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[550] St. John, *Nachalo i konets nashego zemnogo mira* (The Beginning and End of our Earthly World), Moscow, 1901, 2004 p. 48.
[551] Daniélou, *Jewish Christianity*, p. 342.

Jews from exile in other lands to the land of Israel, followed by their conversion to Christ. Perhaps not coincidentally, when the Jews under Zerubbabel and Joshua returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, and started to rebuild the temple, the first great feast they celebrated was the Feast of Tabernacles (I Ezra 5.50); for it is the feast of return and conversion...

The earliest such prophecy we find in Deuteronomy: **When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. The Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you. You will again obey the Lord and follow all his commands I am giving you today.** (30.1-8).

One of the clearest of these prophecies is in Ezekiel, where, after describing how the Jews will spend seven months clearing up after the destruction of Gog and Magog, the prophet continues: **All the nations shall know that the house of Israel was led captive because of their sins, because they rebelled against Me, and I turned My face from them, and delivered them into the hands of their enemies, and they all fell by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions did I deal with them, and I turned My face from them. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Now will I turn back captivity in Jacob, and will have mercy on the house of Israel, and will be jealous for the sake of My holy name** (39.23-25). **For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you** [baptism]**, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses… And you shall be My people, and I will be your God** (Ezekiel 36.24-25,28).

Again, in Jeremiah we read: **Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days, says the Lord, that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord'. It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore. At that time Jerusalem shall be called the Throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem. Nor more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers** (3.16-18).

Again, in Zephaniah we read: **From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My suppliants, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring Me offering. On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against Me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain. For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord, those who are left in Israel... I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors, and I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gathered you together; yea, I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.** (3.10-13,18-20).

And so all Israel (i.e. Christian Jews and Gentiles together) **will be saved; as it is written: The deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob** (Romans 11.26; Isaiah 59.20).

One more point should be made with regard to the Feast of Tabernacles: its close relationship to the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Both Tabernacles and the Exaltation last for eight days; both take place around September-October. Both celebrate the triumph of Christianity on an ecumenical scale: the Feast of Exaltation – the triumph of St. Constantine over paganism throughout the Roman Empire, the oikoumene, or "inhabited earth" of the time, and the Feast of Tabernacles – the triumph of the faith over all heresies and apostasies throughout the world.

September 21 / October 4, 2011; revised June 11/24, 2013.
Day of the Holy Spirit.

APPENDIX 5. THE BEAST AND THE WHORE

Introduction

Shortly before the Russian revolution, St. Barsanuphius of Optina wrote: "In the Apocalypse it is said: **Blessed is he that readeth the words of this book.** If this is written, it means that it is really so, for the words of the Sacred Scripture are the words of the Holy Spirit. But in what does this blessedness consist? This question is the more pertinent, in that people may object that we do not understand anything of what is written. Perhaps the blessedness consists in the consolation to be gained from reading the Divine words. One can also think as follows: that which is not understood by us now will become understandable when the time described comes to pass. Judge for yourselves. Who reads the Apocalypse now? Almost exclusively those who live in monasteries and in theological academies and seminaries – they have to. But in the world hardly anyone reads it. Hence it is clear that he who will read the Apocalypse before the end of the world will be truly blessed, for he will understand what is taking place. And in understanding he will prepare himself. In reading he will see in the events described in the Apocalypse one or other of the events contemporary with him."[552]

Armed with this blessing, let us approach the interpretation of two of the most vivid symbolical figures of the Apocalypse – the beast and the whore. While any such interpretation must be tentative and hypothetical, if it helps us to understand the events contemporary with us even to a small extent it will be spiritually useful. And if, as the elder says, some things still remain incomprehensible to us, they "will become understandable when the time described comes to pass" – and that time is surely not far off now…[553]

The first thing that becomes obvious when considering the beast and the whore is that with their multiple heads and horns they are *highly complex* symbols, and do not refer exclusively to one person or state or time. Clearly they are phenomena that recur throughout history. They may reach a climax of development towards the end of the world, but they are present throughout history in different forms.

The second preliminary point is that while both are evil, the beast is a masculine, aggressive kind of evil, while the whore is a feminine, sensual kind. Taking into account how masculine and feminine symbolism is used in other books of the Bible, particularly the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, we can make the following first approximate identification: the whore is *religious evil* throughout history, and the beast is *political evil.*

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[552] Sergius Fomin, *Russia before the Second Coming* (First Edition), Sergiev Posad, 1993, p. 79.

[553] As Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow said: "The prophecies become clearer the nearer we come to their decisive fulfilment" (quoted in Sergius and Tamara Fomin, *Russia before the Second Coming* (Third Edition), Sergiev Posad, 1998, vol. I, p. 19).

The third point to be made is that almost all commentators identify the beast with *the Antichrist*. There is much less unanimity about the whore. But in view of our earlier conclusions, we can say that she represents *the religion of the Antichrist.*

The Old Testament

Let us now develop this hypothesis in more detail, beginning with the question: where and when did the phenomena symbolised by the whore and the beast originate in history?

The answer to this question is: in Babylon shortly after the Flood of Noah. In Genesis 10.8-11 we read about Nimrod, who "began to be a mighty one upon the earth", "a mighty hunter before the Lord" and the ruler of almost the whole of what is now Iraq. In the next chapter we read of the Tower of Babel built by Nimrod in his territory in order to reach the heavens and make a name for himself on earth. This vainglorious scheme was displeasing to God, Who destroyed it and confused the tongues of its builders. They scattered over the face of the earth, taking the Babylonian religion, the ancestor of all pagan religions with them. So here we have the first types of the beast and the whore, the Antichrist and the religion of the Antichrist, located in the city with the same name as that given to the whore of the Apocalypse.

If we fast forward nearly 1400 years, we come to Nimrod's successor, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Political evil now was deeply entwined with religious evil, as in the time of Nimrod. But the evil was worse now; for Babylon not only committed its own politico-religious evil in its own land, but overwhelmed the true state and religious worship of Israel, destroying the Temple and taking the king and people of Israel into captivity in Babylon. There the people were compelled to worship the idol set up by Nebuchadnezzar; and it was only the heroic confession of the Three Holy Children and, later, of the Prophet Daniel that won for the Israelites a measure of religious freedom.

Daniel was also able to interpret two visions of Nebuchadnezzar (in chapters 2 and 7), whose imagery was incorporated directly into the image of the beast and the whore in the Apocalypse of St. John.

Combining Daniel's own interpretation of these visions with that of the Holy Fathers, especially St. Hippolytus of Rome, we are able to develop the typology of the Antichrist-beast figure further, so as to see the beast not only in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom (the gold of the statue in the first vision), but also in three succeeding kingdoms: that of the Persians (the silver of the statue), of the Macedonian Greeks (the bronze of the statue) and of the Romans (the iron and clay of the statue). The whole statue, representing the beast in his pre-christian incarnations, is then destroyed by a Stone,

representing the Kingdom of Christ, the successor and fulfilment of the kingdom of Israel.

This typology is developed further in the second vision. The four antichristian kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome are represented this time by four beasts. But the fourth beast, Rome, is represented as having ten horns, which are ten further kingdoms. St. Hippolytus says that these will be "democracies" – a form of government that had disappeared from the earth at the time of his commentary. Another interpretation is that they represent the ten periods of anti-Christian persecution that took place in the first three centuries of the Roman empire.

And then among the ten horns there arises an eleventh, who will "destroy fearfully" and "will even rise against the Prince of princes. But he shall be broken without human means" (7.24, 25). Patristic commentators unanimously describe this eleventh kingdom as the kingdom of the last, personal Antichrist, who will be destroyed by Christ Himself at His Second Coming…

Rome and Israel

Fast forward another 1000 years or so, and we come to the time of the triumph of Christianity in the Roman empire. Daniel's first prophecy has been fulfilled already: the pagan Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman kingdoms have passed, and the era of Christ's Kingdom has dawned. It has not yet "filled the whole earth", but it has filled "the inhabited earth" (oikoumene) of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world from Britain to the borders of Persia.

What are the beast and the whore in the first centuries of the Christian era? Undoubtedly the beast is the pagan Roman empire, or at any rate the empire in those (relatively short) periods of its existence when it persecuted the Church, compelling the Christians to worship the emperor as god. As for the whore, this refers not only to the cult of the emperor but also to the multitude of pagan religions from all parts of the empire which all found their home in Rome in this period. For just as the Babylon of Nimrod was the fount of all pagan religions, spewing out its religious evil throughout the world, so the Rome of the pagan emperors was the gathering point and bringing back together, as it were, of all these religions and their mystical teachings and rites, which often involved temple prostitution and other debauchery unacceptable for the Christian conscience. Worthily, therefore, was pagan Rome called *Babylon* in the Apocalypse: "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth, … the woman drunk with the blood of the martyrs and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Revelation 17.5, 6).

The whore is said to commit fornication with the kings of the earth, implying that all these kings – presumably the rulers of the semi-autonomous regions of the Roman empire - partake of the religious evil she represents. She

is also said to be carried by the beast, "which was full of the names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns" (Revelation 17.3), implying that the supreme political ruler of the time – the Roman emperor – supported and sponsored the whore's abominations. All this fits very well with the political and religious situation during the pagan Roman empire.

However, the Apocalypse makes it plain that the symbolic significance of the beast and the whore was not exhausted in the Roman period. For the angel says to St. John: "I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition" (17.7). Again, it is said of the beast that it "is, and is not, and yet is" (17.8). And again, that of the seven heads of the beast, "five have fallen, and one is, and the other has yet to come. And when he comes he must continue a short time" (17.10).

There is a puzzle here. We have just identified at least one of the incarnations of the beast, with some confidence, with pagan Rome. And yet here the angel says that the beast, at the time of the writing of the Apocalypse – that, is during the reign of the fiercely anti-Christian Domitian, who considered himself to be a god – "is not". On the other hand, the same angel says that the *sixth* head of the beast "is" at the time of writing. How can the beast be said to be and not to be at one and the same time?

In order to solve this enigma, let us first try and identify those heads of the beast – whom the angel identifies as "mountains" or "kings" – that had already fallen at the time of writing. In our discussion of Daniel's visions, we saw that four of the heads could be identified with Babylon, Persia, Macedonian Greece and Rome. However, we must modify our definition of "Rome" because at the time of the Apocalypse Imperial Rome had definitely not fallen. Perhaps Republican Rome is meant – that fell with the ascension to power of Augustus, the first Roman emperor. So we can now identify four out of the five fallen kingdoms as: Babylon, Persia, Macedonian Greece and Republican Rome. However, it may be objected that Republican Rome was not a kingdom, but a republic, so does not count… Another alternative is to add *Egypt* to the list of pre-Christian kingdoms… Or *Assyria* could be counted as a separate kingdom from Babylon…

However, none of these solutions to the question: who are the five fallen kings? enables us to answer the question: which of them "is, and is not, and yet is" (17.8)? Our hypothesis is that this mysterious appearing and disappearing kingdom refers to *the anti-Christian kingdom of Israel.* Israel from the time of David to shortly before the birth of Christ, the true successor of David on his throne, had been a true kingdom, a type of the Kingdom of God Himself. But then Herod came to power. He was neither a Jew nor a descendant of David; he destroyed the old Hasmonaean dynasty and tried to kill Christ Himself at His Birth. His kingdom was semi-autonomous, thanks to the favour and support he had won from Rome. But this had been achieved at the cost of his faithfulness to the God of Israel (he worshipped Jupiter in

Rome and built temples to pagan gods). So Christ, the true King of Israel, while recognizing Rome as a legitimate political power, did not recognize Herod's rule – which is why He agreed to speak to Pilate, but not to Herod. And only forty years after His crucifixion, Herod's kingdom, usurped now by the Jewish pharisaic revolution, was destroyed by the Romans.

And yet the anti-Christian kingdom of Israel continued to exist in the underground. For the Pharisees formed a government-in-exile which, significantly, took up residence in *Babylon*, where also that greatest monument of religious evil, the Babylonian Talmud, was composed. Therefore anti-Christian Israel both existed and did not exist – it no longer existed as an independent centre of political power, but it continued to exist in the underground, supporting the new form of religious evil, Talmudism, which gradually departed more and more from its monotheistic roots until, with the formation of the Kabbala, it merged with the "old-style" evil of paganism...

So we can now – tentatively, as always when interpreting the Apocalypse - identify the five fallen kings as: Babylon, Persia, Macedonian Greece, Republican Rome and Herodian, anti-Christian Israel. The sixth head, therefore, which was still flourishing at the time of the writing of the Apocalypse, was Imperial Rome. Meanwhile, the fifth head, anti-Christian Israel, continued to exist in the underground but without an independent power-base, a situation that continued essentially unchanged for over 1800 years as the first, pagan Roman empire passed into the New, Christian Rome of Byzantium, and then the Third Rome of Moscow…

The Seventh and Eighth Heads: Soviet Russia and Israel

What, then, is the seventh head? Three candidates have been proposed: Papal Rome, the Muslim Caliphs and the leaders of Soviet and neo-Soviet Russia.

With regard to Papal Rome, we must not confuse the whore – religious evil – with the beast – political evil. The Papacy has a strong claim to being another incarnation of the whore, the religious evil of Babylon. Its luxury is proverbial, its murderous opposition to the true, Orthodox faith of Christ is undisputed, and in recent times it has tried to become the mother of all the harlots of the world by uniting all religions – not excluding Judaism – under its ecumenist umbrella. Although Papal Rome tried to make herself out to be the sovereign of all Christian political rulers from the eleventh century onwards, this met with strong opposition, not only in the Orthodox East, but also in the Catholic and Protestant West, and must be judged to have failed. Even if we identify the Holy Roman Empire of the Habsburgs as the political arm of the papacy, it was destroyed by Napoleon in 1806. And the Pope's own political dominions were taken away from him by the Italian government in 1870. So, whatever its political ambitions and influence, the

Papacy must be judged still to be a religious institution, and therefore part of the whore, not of the beast.

A similar point can be made with regard to the Caliphs. Islam was and continues to be a powerful religious force. But unlike Christianity it has never developed a doctrine of the State; even the idea of the relative independence of the State from the priesthood is weakly developed in Islamic thought. In the sixteenth century there existed three powerful Islamic empires: the Mughals in India, the Savefids in Persia and the Ottomans in Turkey. But they were not united, they did not share a common caliph, and they all weakened and eventually fell victim to Western powers…

In 1917, however, two much more powerful candidates for the title of seventh head of the beast arose almost simultaneously: Soviet Russia and the Zionist state of Israel. Indeed, insofar as the main leaders of both movements were Jews originating in the Pale of Settlement in Western Russia, we may seem them as two branches of the same political phenomenon, *the re-emergence of Jewish power from the underground*. The October revolution in Petrograd, and Lord Balfour's promise of a Homeland for the Jews in Palestine, were both reported in the same column of newsprint in the London *Times* for November 9, 1917. This amazing "coincidence" surely signifies that here we see the two horns of the beast of Jewish power emerging simultaneously from the sea of the Gentile peoples. The beast that "was" in the time of Christ, but "was not" after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., now "was again", as the Apocalypse had prophesied.

The fall of Russia, the Third Rome, in 1917 represented "the vengeance of Zion" on the empire that had defeated it in 70 (which the Talmudic Jews called "Edom"). With the removal of "him who restrains" (II Thessalonians 2.7), legitimate monarchical power, the Antichrist was now free to appear openly again on the stage of world history. And he now appears first as the *collective* Antichrist of Soviet power, and then, later, as the *personal* Antichrist, the false king of the Jews, the new Herod – who, however, will be born in Russia according to St. Seraphim of Sarov.

Nevertheless, while closely related, Soviet Russia and Israel cannot be counted as *the same* head. Our hypothesis is that Soviet Russia – the most militantly anti-Christian regime in history and the only one to be formally anathematized by the Orthodox Church - is the seventh head. It is said to continue "a short time" (17.10) – in the timespan of human history, the less-than-a-hundred years of Soviet and neo-Soviet history is indeed a short time, and recent events have led many commentators to prophesy the speedy demise of Putin's regime.

We hypothesize that Soviet power, the *collective* Antichrist, is also that head which "was mortally wounded, and its deadly wound was healed" (13.3). For the Soviet regime has been "mortally wounded" three times, and each time it has recovered. The first was at the height of the White successes in the Civil

War in 1919. The second was at the height of Hitler's successes in his invasion of Russia in 1941. And the third was the actual downfall of the Soviet State in 1991, that "geopolitical tragedy", in Putin's words, which he is now determined to reverse…

As for the eighth head, "the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition" (17.11). Since this is the last head of the beast, we must identify it with the *personal* Antichrist, the false king of the Jews, the reincarnation of that anti-Christian Israelite power that we have identified as the fifth head. This power "was" in Christ's time, "was not" under the Roman empire, and "will be" in the last times, being conceived in 1917 through Lord Balfour's declaration, being born in 1948 with the foundation of the Zionist State of Israel, and coming to full power and manhood in the very last period of human history.

The Beast versus the Whore

The angel goes on: "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast... The ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire" (17.12-13, 16).

In the next, eighteenth chapter there follows a detailed description of the fall of Babylon, hailed by the inhabitants of heaven but bewailed by the merchants of the earth because the enormous possibilities for enrichment that she provided have vanished...

The event described appears to be the climax of a war, perhaps a nuclear one, in which the two main forms of evil in the world – political evil and religious evil, the beast and the whore – turn against each other, and the whore is destroyed "by fire". How are we to understanding this in view of the fact that for most of history the whore has "sat" on the beast, being supported and sustained by it? We know that Satan's kingdom is divided against itself and therefore must eventually fall. But can we say anything more about this most momentous of schisms? Is there any clue in the sacred text, or in contemporary history, that would enable us to identify the combatants in this war a little more precisely?

One vivid detail immediately strikes us: "Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What is like this great city?" (Revelation 18.17-18). Evidently, insofar as Babylon can be identified with a geographical place or city, it is situated *on the sea.* And the image of sailors on the sea watching the smoke of the city's burning reminds us of perhaps the defining image and symbol of contemporary reality: the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001. That

event, taking place on the feast of St. John the Baptist, the prophet of repentance, was a powerful call to the western world to repent of its sins. So far, its message has not been heeded, and we may expect that the destruction of the Twin Towers will be followed by a far larger-scale destruction of western cities, perhaps of the whole of western civilization.

The hypothesis, therefore, is that Babylon in its present-day incarnation is *western civilization as a whole,* and that what we see here described in the Sacred Scripture is the destruction of its most potent symbol and "capital", the Twin Towers of New York. That the West in general and New York in particular should be identified with Babylon is confirmed by a number of facts. First, the street-plan of New York is modelled on that of ancient Babylon. Secondly, it is in New York that the United Nations is situated with its declared purpose of uniting all nations in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a cardinal aim of which is a reduction and "levelling" down of all religions to a lowest common denominator. And thirdly, New York, together with other great cities of the West – Amsterdam, Paris, Geneva, London and Chicago – has taken the lead in hosting and promoting the ecumenical movement in such institutions as the World Council of Parliaments (first meeting: Chicago in 1893) and the World Council of Churches (first meeting: Amsterdam in 1948).

St. John Maximovich once said that America was a great nation, but that she was threatened by the sins of greed and sensuality. These are the "Babylonian" sins of a society that permits everything, every religious abomination and every deviant and perverse life-style. Of course, America is not alone in this: her parent-civilization of Western Europe is, it could be argued, even more debauched. However, the popular imagination – and especially the imagination of non-western peoples – has seized on America in particular because of her size, wealth, and military and technological superiority over every other nation. America for many around the world *is* the Antichrist – in this respect, little has changed since the days of the Cold War.

This raises the objection: why should America and the West be ascribed to the whore and not to the beast, especially in view of the military ventures of the West in recent years? And the answer is that, for all the West's military power, it is still not a *militaristic* power; it spends far less of its GDP on military expenditure than Russia or China or some Muslim powers. The power of the West in the world is primarily "soft" rather than "hard", religious and civilizational rather than political and military, feminine and seductive rather than masculine and impositional. It is all the more dangerous for this feminine seductiveness, which imperceptibly weakens the soul and makes it impervious to the call of the truth. But at the same time this power is also weakness. Thus for all its power to eavesdrop on its and other states' citizens, it allows more free speech than its rivals – to its undoubted cost. It is precisely this feminine softness and indiscipline that makes the West vulnerable to attack from more masculine, disciplined states. In the 1930s the

flabby western democracies squandered the large lead they had over Nazi Germany through their weak-willed refusal to make the necessary preparations and interventions in time. The same pattern appears to be being repeated in the Ukraine today in relation to neo-Soviet Russia. The result will almost certainly be disaster; for just as the drunken and effeminate Belshazzar of Babylon was suddenly overwhelmed by the more manly Cyrus the Mede; and just as cultured but divided and squabbling Athenians were eventually defeated by the more ascetic Spartans, so the West will eventually be defeated by the more determined and fanatical neo-Soviets of "Vlad the Great".

As for the "ten kings" who carry out the will of the beast, the clue to their identity lies in the identity of those who destroyed the Twin Towers in 2001. They were all Muslims. And if there is one group of States that hates America and the West even more than the neo-Soviets it is the fundamentalist Muslim States, especially Iran. Nor is it necessary for them to have nuclear bombs or interballistic missiles. In today's world, a bomb in a suitcase, or a hacker working from a home computer, or a passenger on an airline with only a penknife in his hand, can do as much damage…

Nor should we forget the State that will almost certainly be the most powerful nation in the world in a very short time and whose kinship to the beast is undoubted: China. The Apocalypse prophesies the intervention of "the kings of the east" with an army of "two hundred million men" (Revelation 16.12, 9.16) at a crucial point in the conflict. Only China could field an army of two hundred million men today…

Conclusion

In chapter nineteen of the Apocalypse (vv. 19-21), we read that, after destroying the whore by fire, the beast will itself be destroyed by the Lord Jesus Christ. For however great the evil of the ecumenist West, the evil of the communist East with its direct challenge to the authority of God and His One True Church – to which Putin's regime, though theist, is no less of a challenge - is even greater. So the Lord deals with this evil directly and personally, thereby avenging the blood of the millions of new martyrs of the communist yoke and ushering a completely new period of human history symbolized by the thousand-year-reign of Christ (Revelation 20).

Of course, evil will not be finally vanquished in this post-war period; there can be no utopia until the Second Coming of Christ; only then can we expect to see the fullness of truth and righteousness upon earth. Nevertheless, institutional evil, both political and religious, will have suffered a shattering blow from which it will take generations to recover. This is what the prophecies tell us. This is our hope and faith. And this hope and faith can give us the strength to endure to the end through the terrible days that await us…

May 13/26, 2014; revised July 19 / August 1, 2017.